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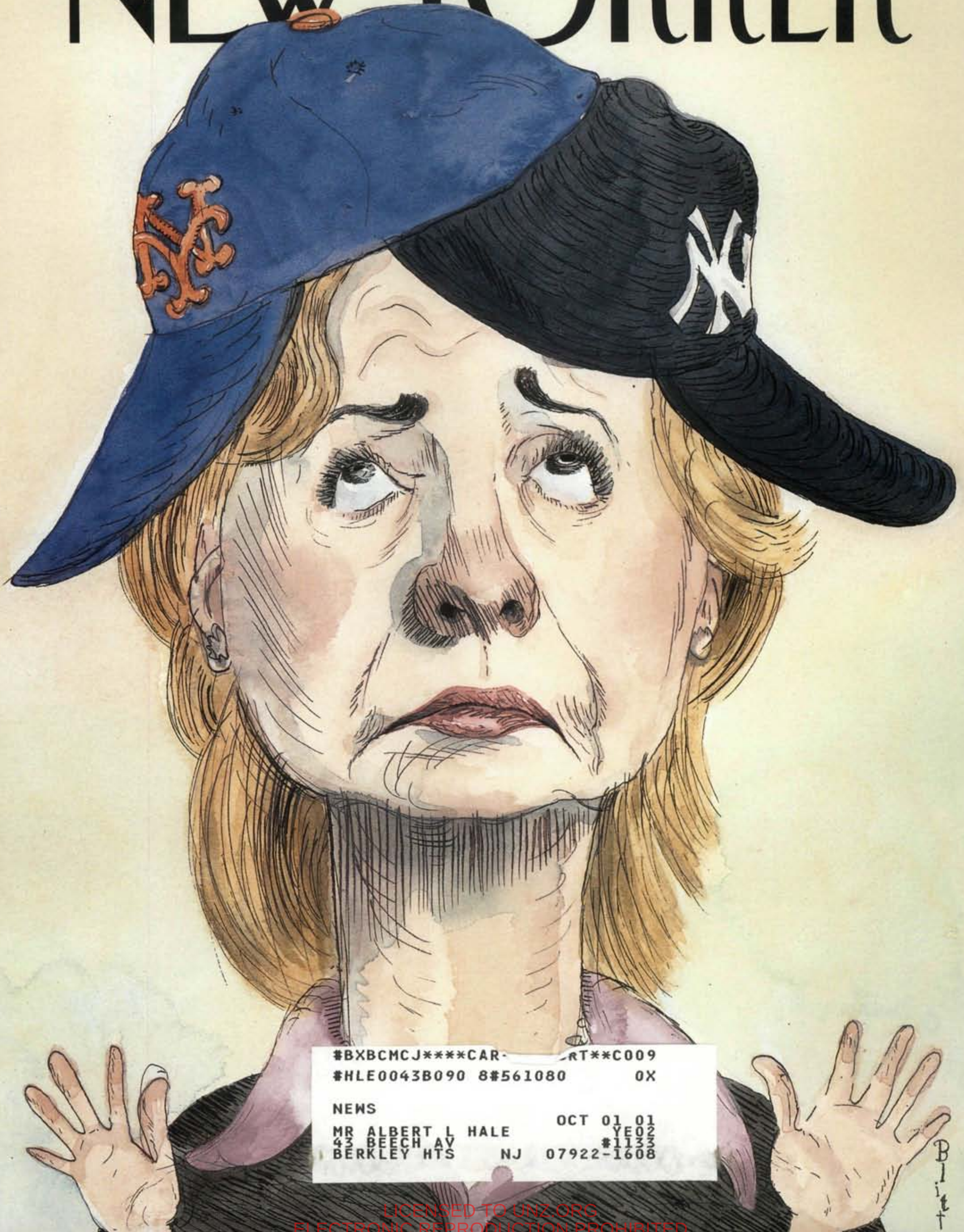
THE NEW YORKER

OCT. 30, 2000



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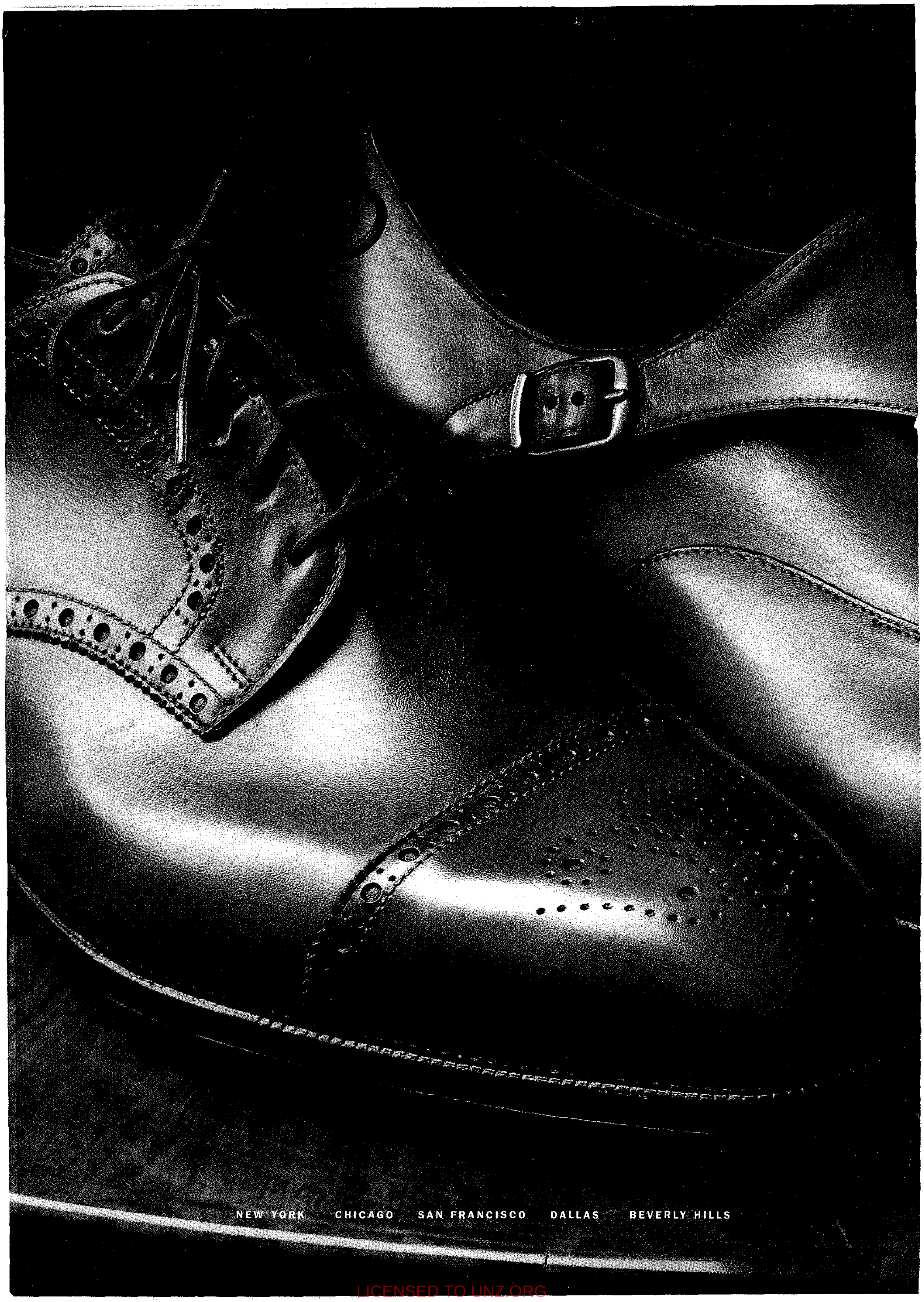
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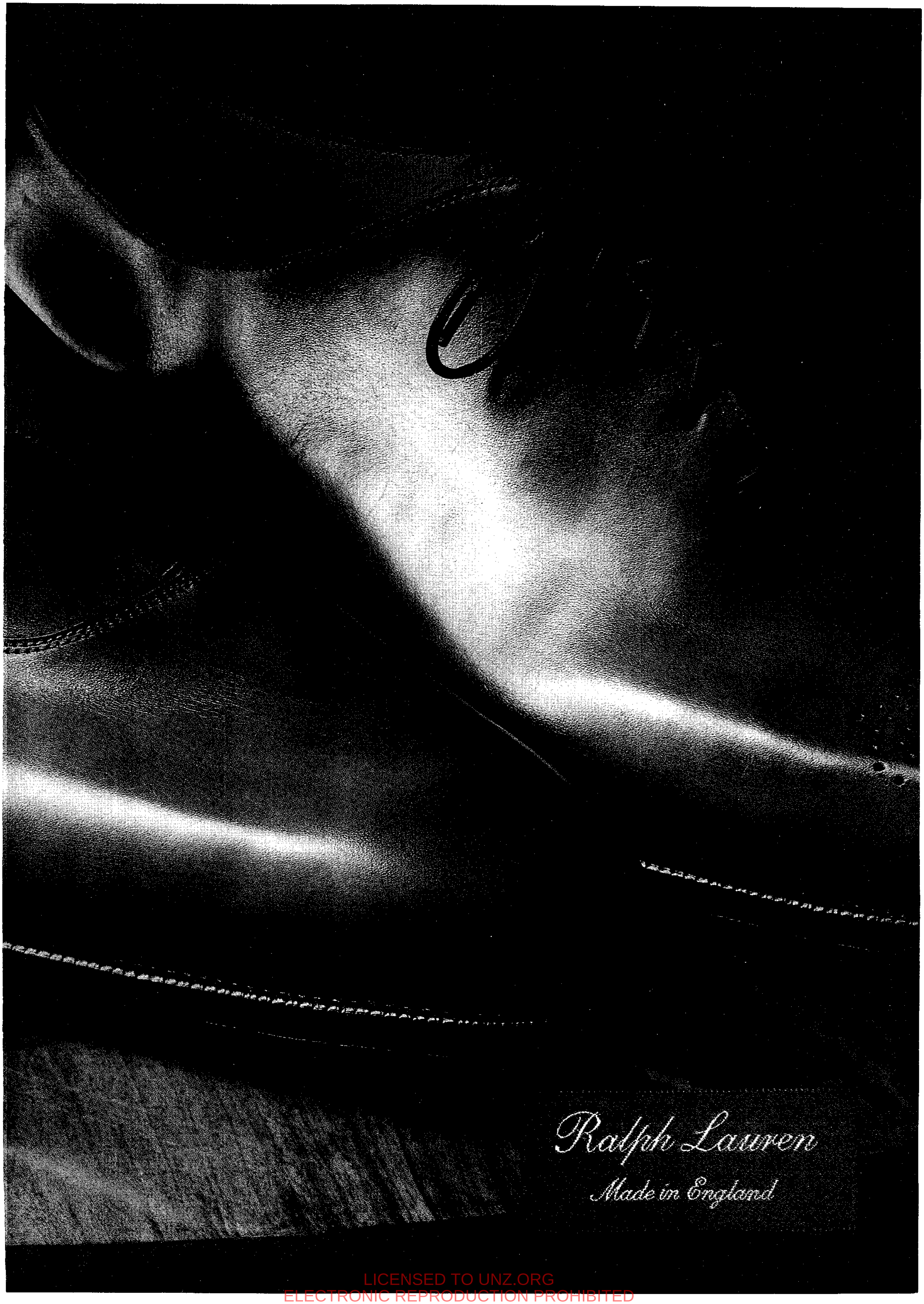
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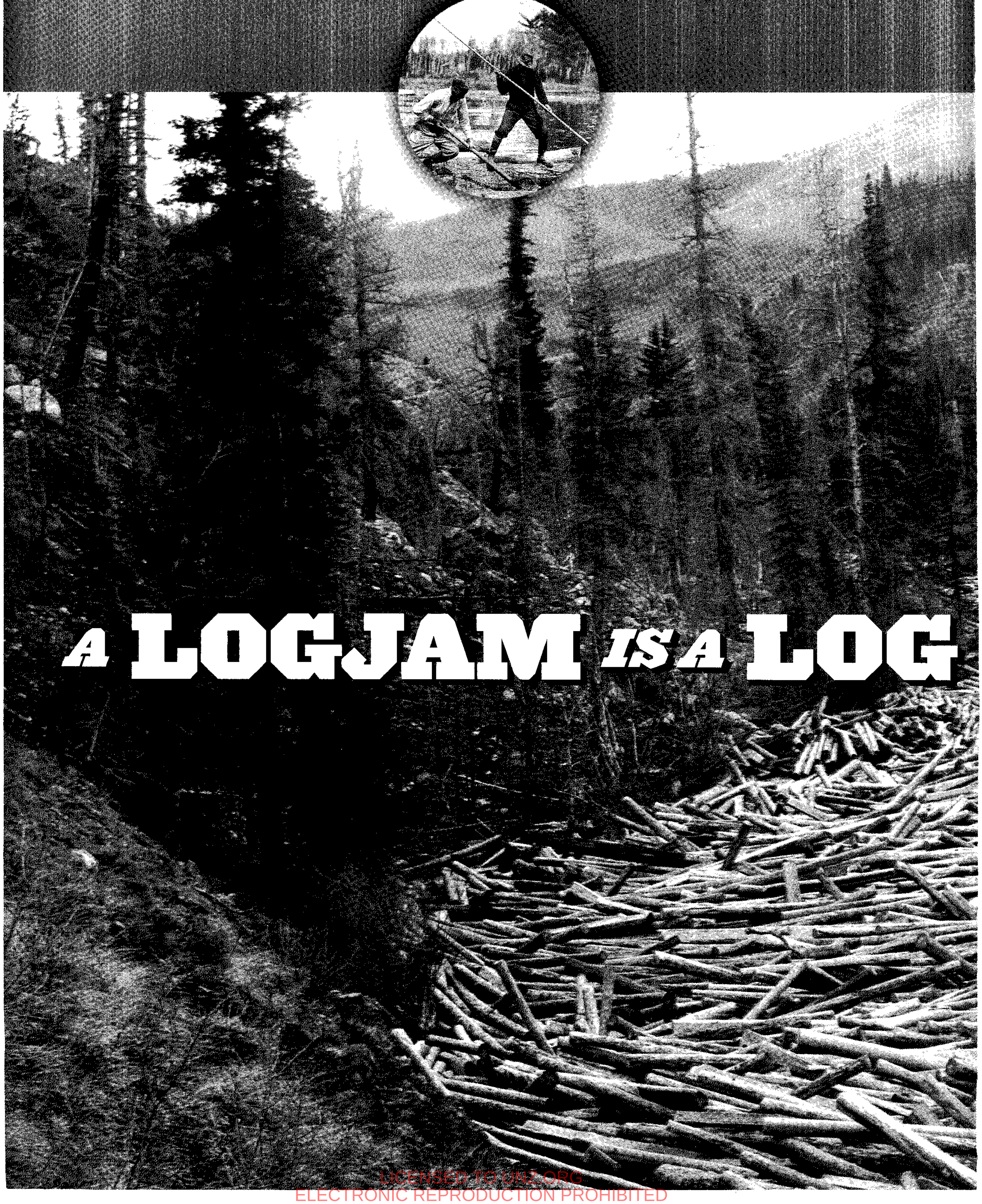

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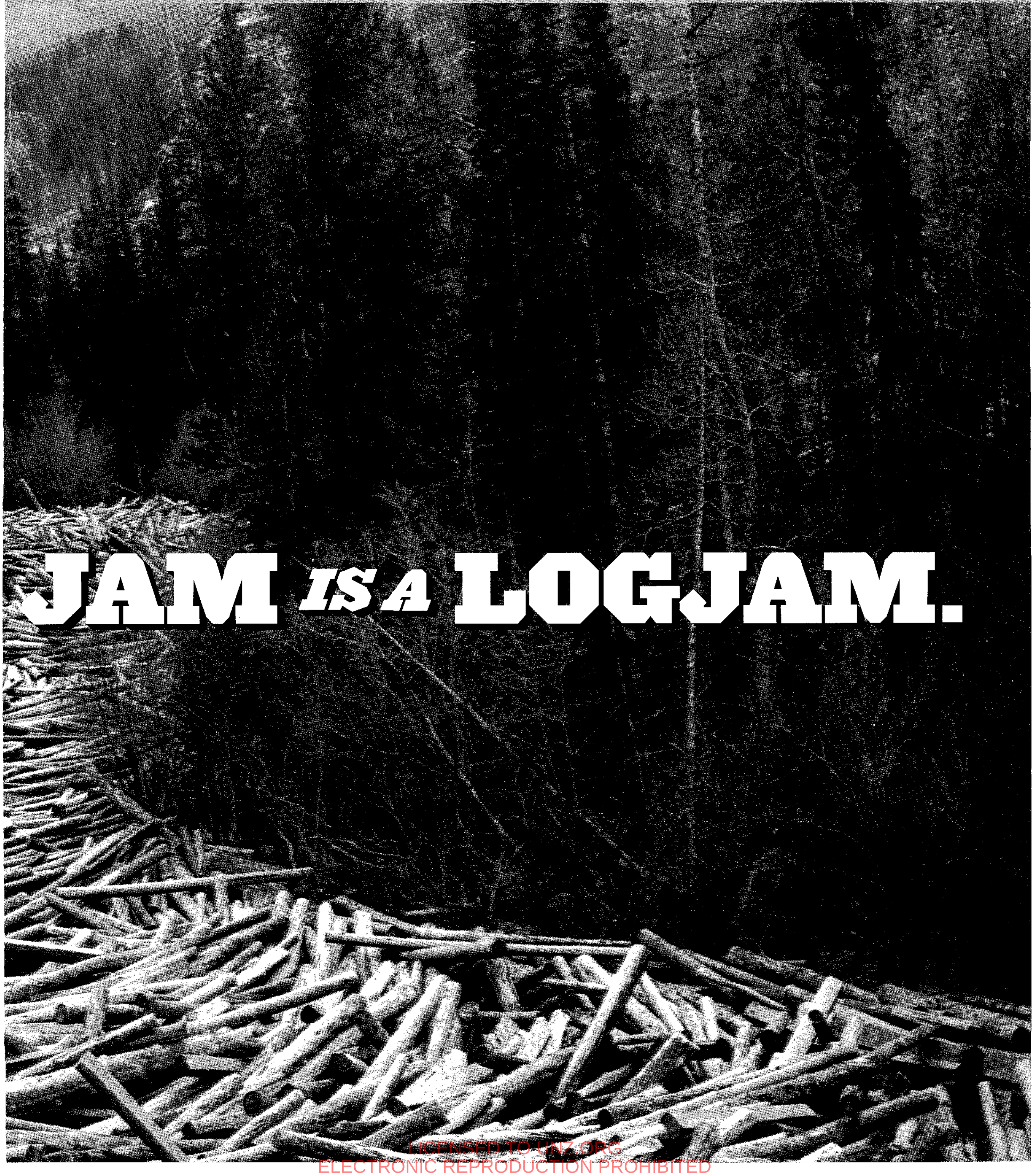

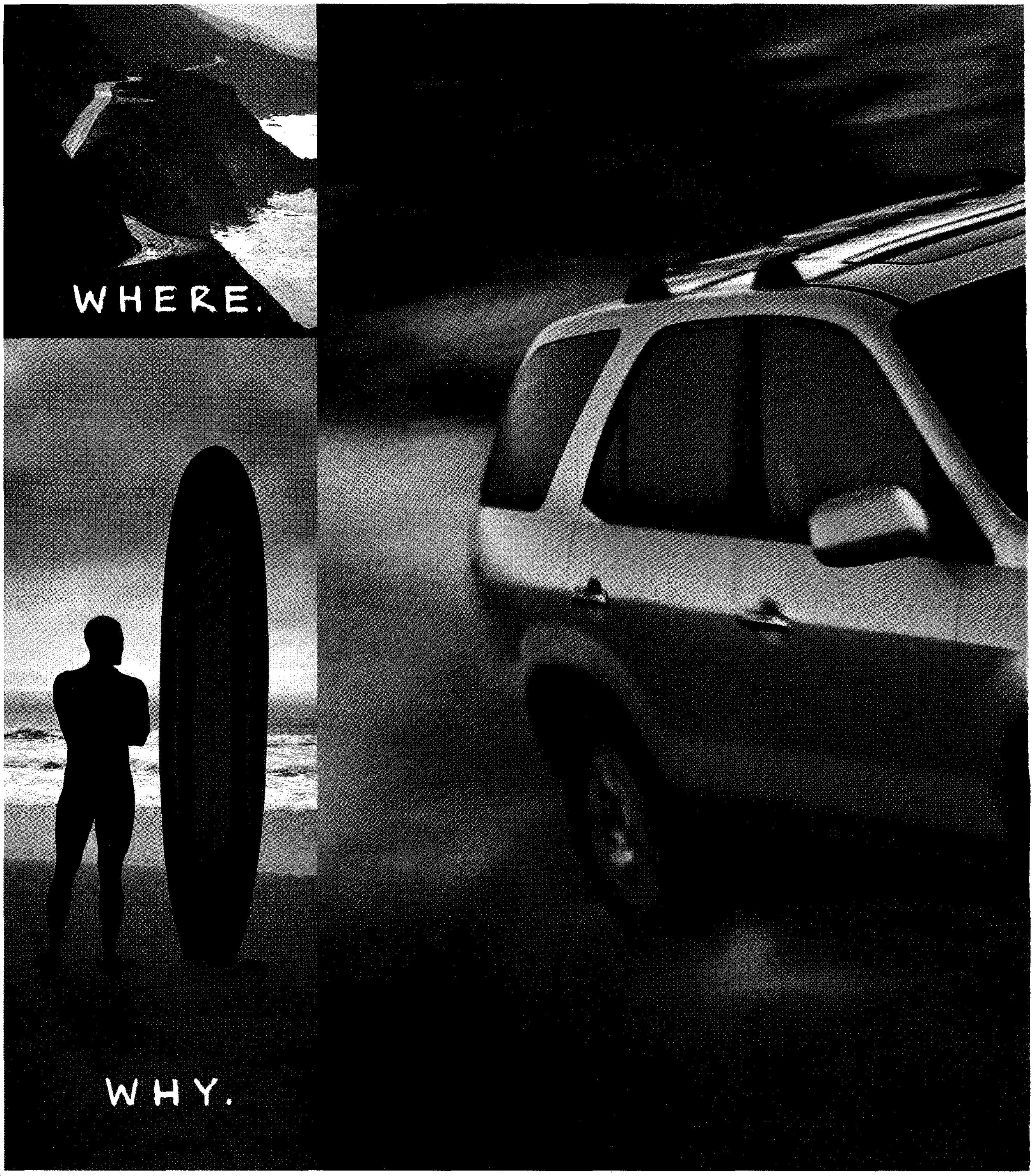

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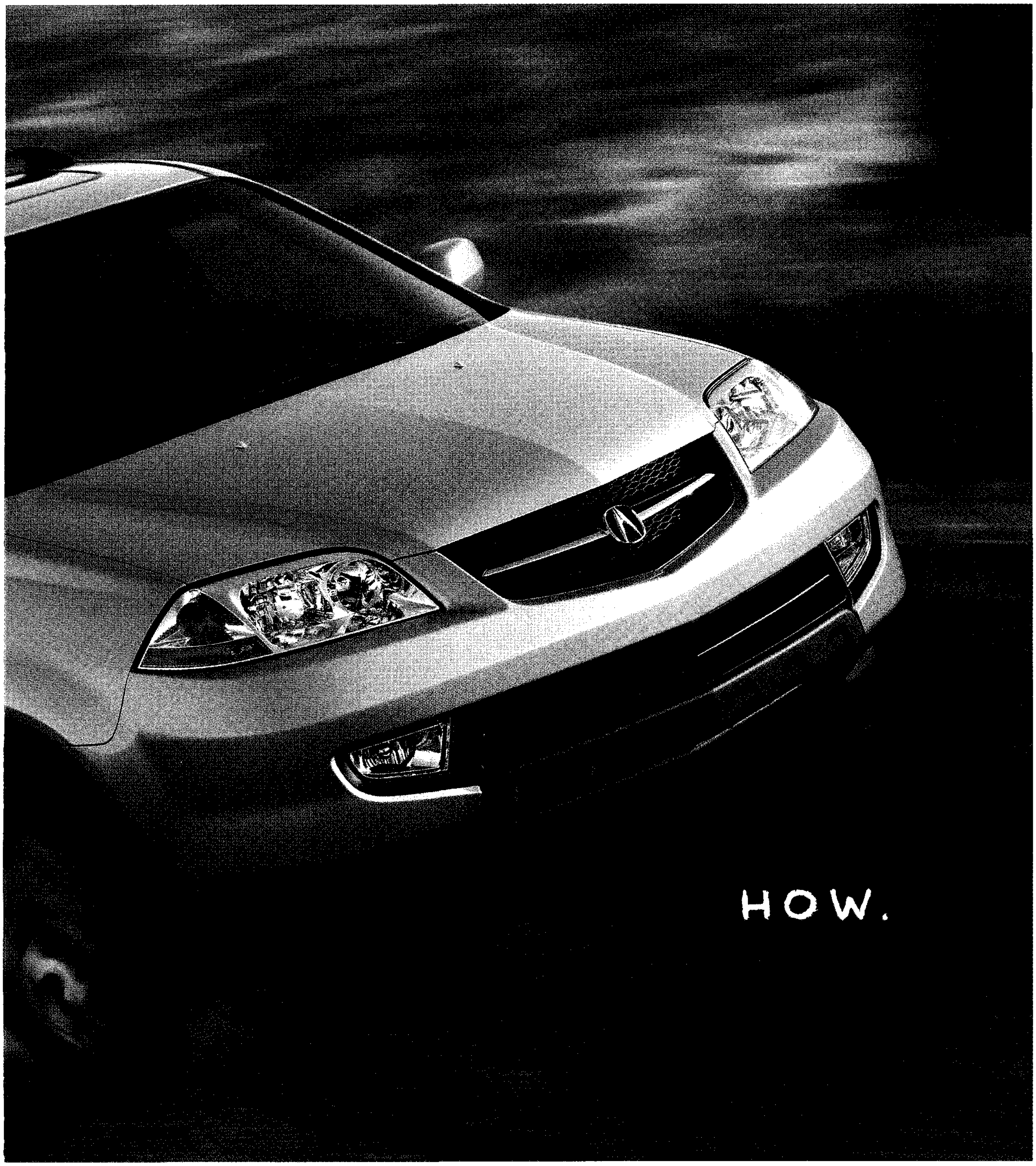

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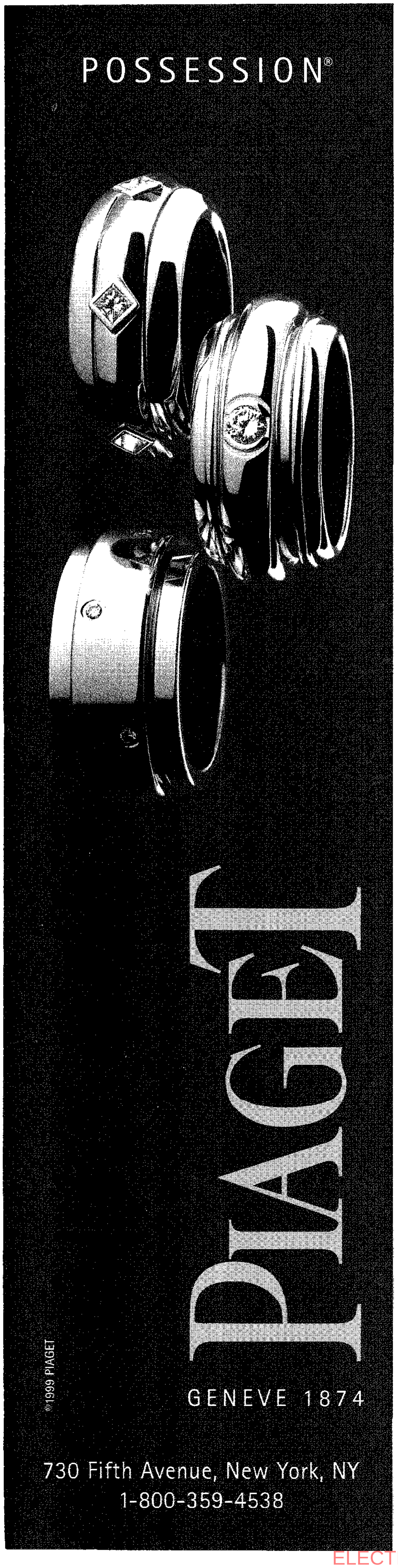
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THE NEW YORKER

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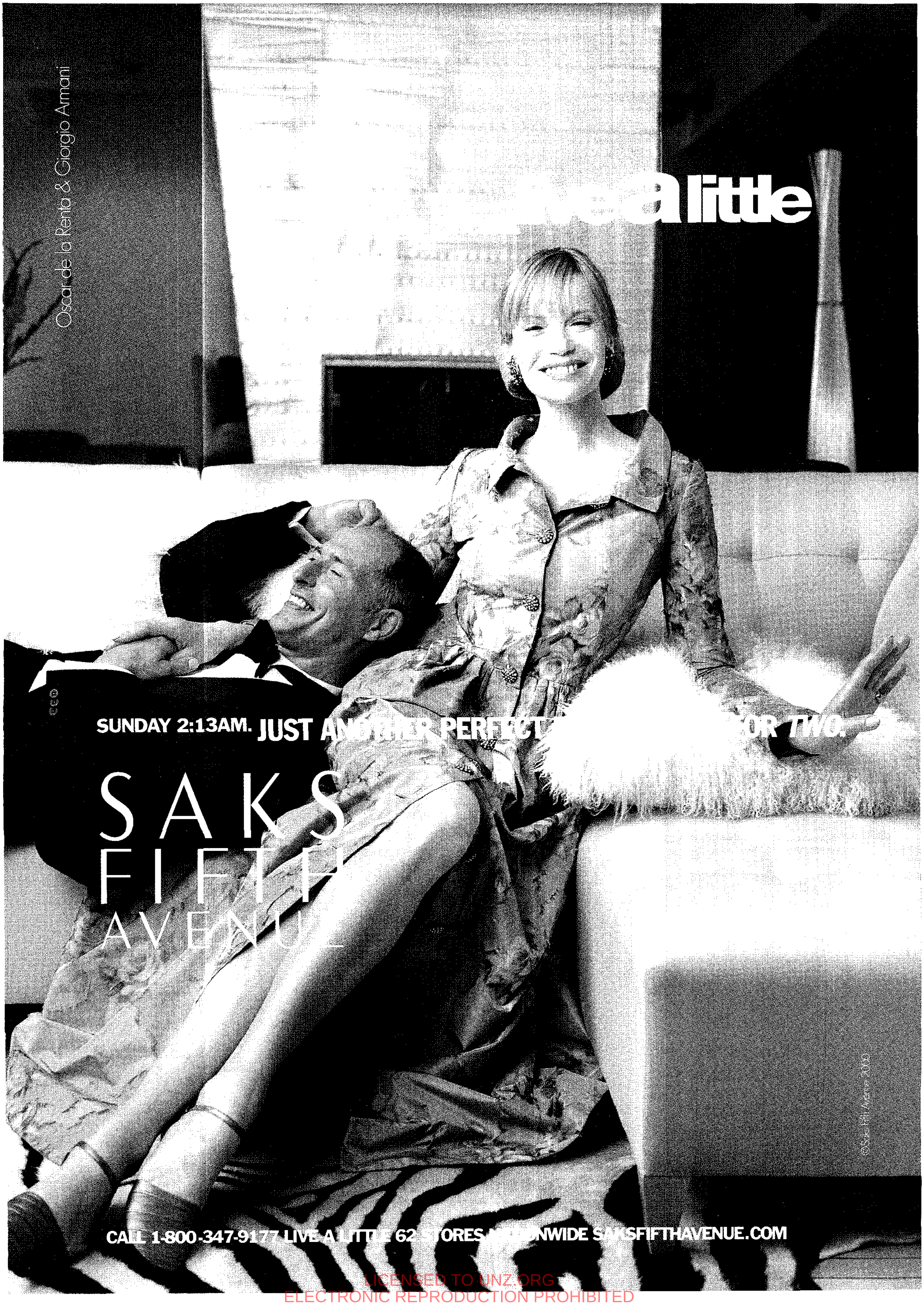
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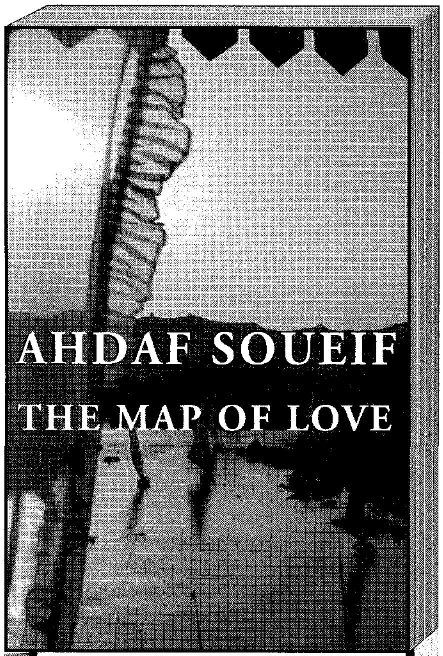

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CONTRIBUTORS

Malcolm Gladwell ("The Pitchman," p. 64) published his first book, "The Tipping Point," in March. An archive of his *New Yorker* articles is available at gladwell.com.

Marisa Silver (Fiction, p. 82) will publish a collection of short stories, "Babe in Paradise," next July.

John Gregory Dunne (Books, p. 92) is the author of six works of nonfiction and five novels, the most recent of which is "Playland."

A. S. Byatt (Books, p. 100) won the Booker Prize in 1990 for her novel "Possession." Her new novel, "The Biographer's Tale," comes out in January.

Johnny Carson (The Talk of the Town, p. 44) was the host of the "Tonight Show" from 1962 to 1992.

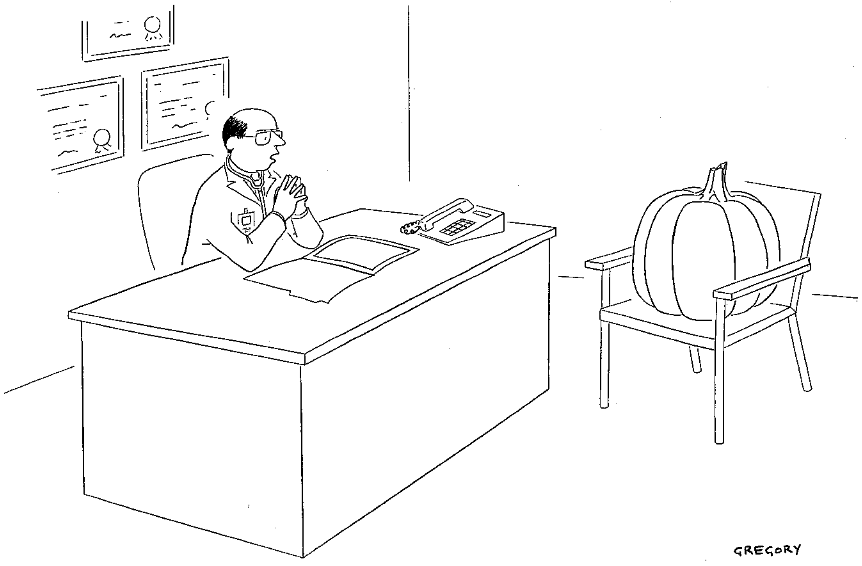
Misha Glenny ("The Redeemers," p. 74) has covered the Balkan crisis since 1986. He is the author of "The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999."

Jeffrey Toobin ("Women in Black," p. 48) is a staff writer. His book "A Vast Conspiracy" is now out in paperback.

Mark Singer ("Town on a String," p. 58) has been a staff writer since 1974. His books include "Mr. Personality" and "Citizen K."

Nick Hornby (Pop Music, p. 104) recently edited "Speaking with the Angel," an anthology of short stories, which will be published in February.

Roz Chast (The Back Page, p. 116) is a cartoonist. Her latest book is "Rationalizations to Live By." ♦



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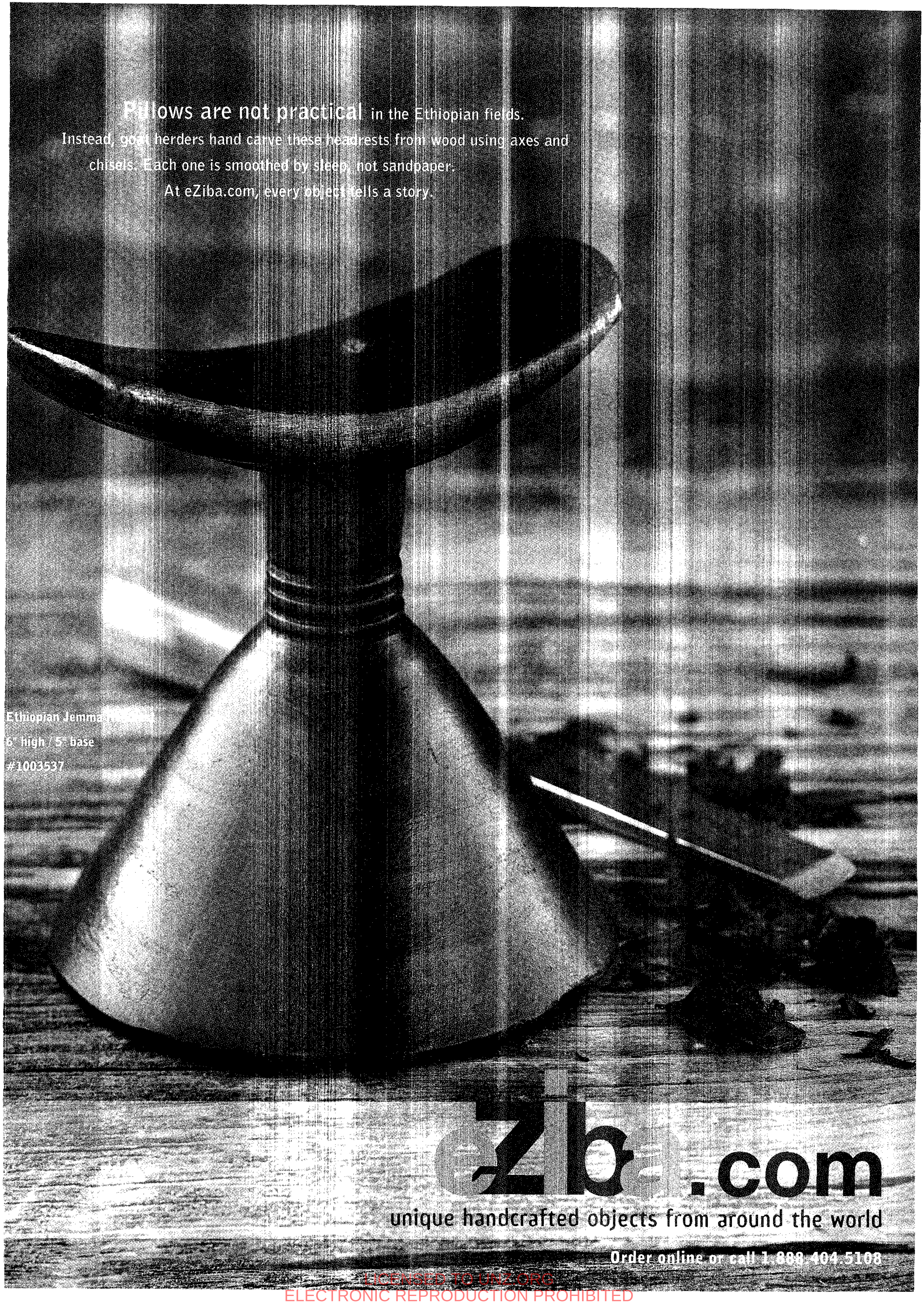

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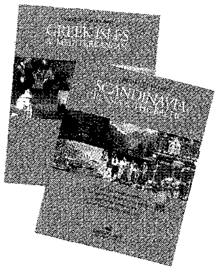

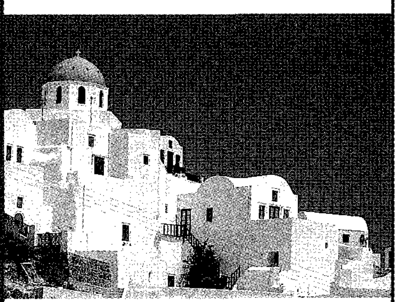

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SCIENCE IN THE JUNGLE

Patrick Tierney's account of the possible connection between measles vaccinations and measles outbreaks merits comment ("The Fierce Anthropologist," October 9th). The Edmonston B vaccine, which I helped develop, and which James Neel and Napoleon Chagnon administered to the Yanomami, had been licensed in the United States and elsewhere since 1963, and was given to more than eighteen million infants and children. It is quite correct that the vaccine was more reactive than its descendants, but it was never demonstrated that those who received it were capable of transmitting the virus. Neel and his colleagues vaccinated in the hope that they could abort an epidemic that had already broken out. I am firmly convinced that the deaths and serious illness the Yanomami experienced were due to a natural "wild" measles virus, not the vaccine. Tierney does a disservice to Neel and to parents around the world whose children receive measles vaccines, which have reduced annual measles deaths from eight million prior to 1963 to eight hundred thousand today, and, one hopes, will someday allow us to eradicate this disease.

Samuel L. Katz, M. D.
Duke University Medical Center
Durham, N. C.

Whatever the truth of the allegations against Chagnon, it appears that the damage done to the Yanomami in the name of science was considerable. But such blatant cases are not all that anthropology has to answer for. The field, for example, is now in thrall to the biotech industry, collecting DNA from "native" peoples in the pursuit of profit. Anthropologists might take Tierney's article as an opportunity to consider what their responsibilities really are.

Alexander H. Joffe
New Rochelle, N. Y.

Tierney distracts attention from the real medical crisis facing the Yanomami. At present, malaria is killing members of the tribe in droves. The Venezuelan government has developed a plan to control this and other endemic illnesses that threaten their survival, but has not fully implemented it. Fixating on what happened more than thirty years ago will not bring the Yanomami back from the brink. Putting health workers in the field will.

John Walden, M. D.
Marshall University School of Medicine
Huntington, W. V.

The recklessness that led to the decimation of the Yanomami is hard to comprehend. Tierney's article reminds us once more that the ego of the so-called modern man is not capable of simply observing or learning from societies regarded as pure or primitive. Even those who come to help have trouble seeing the Yanomami for who they truly are. We may have to look beyond our modern world for a code of ethics sufficient to prevent researchers from harming those they claim to want to understand.

Michael Ballantyne
Pineville, N. C.

A STUDY IN FASCISM

The publication of the Romanian writer Mihail Sebastian's diary ("Friends and Fascists," October 2nd) is bad news for the apologists who have tried to minimize the late Mircea Eliade's virulently anti-Semitic views. They are now on record for all to see. Those of us who were schooled on Eliade's encyclopedic works on comparative religion, myth, and ritual will have to ask the same kinds of painful questions posed about Heidegger. How much did his openly Fascist convictions shape his work? What place should his books now have in the study of religion?

Harvey Cox
Harvard Divinity School
Cambridge, Mass.

•

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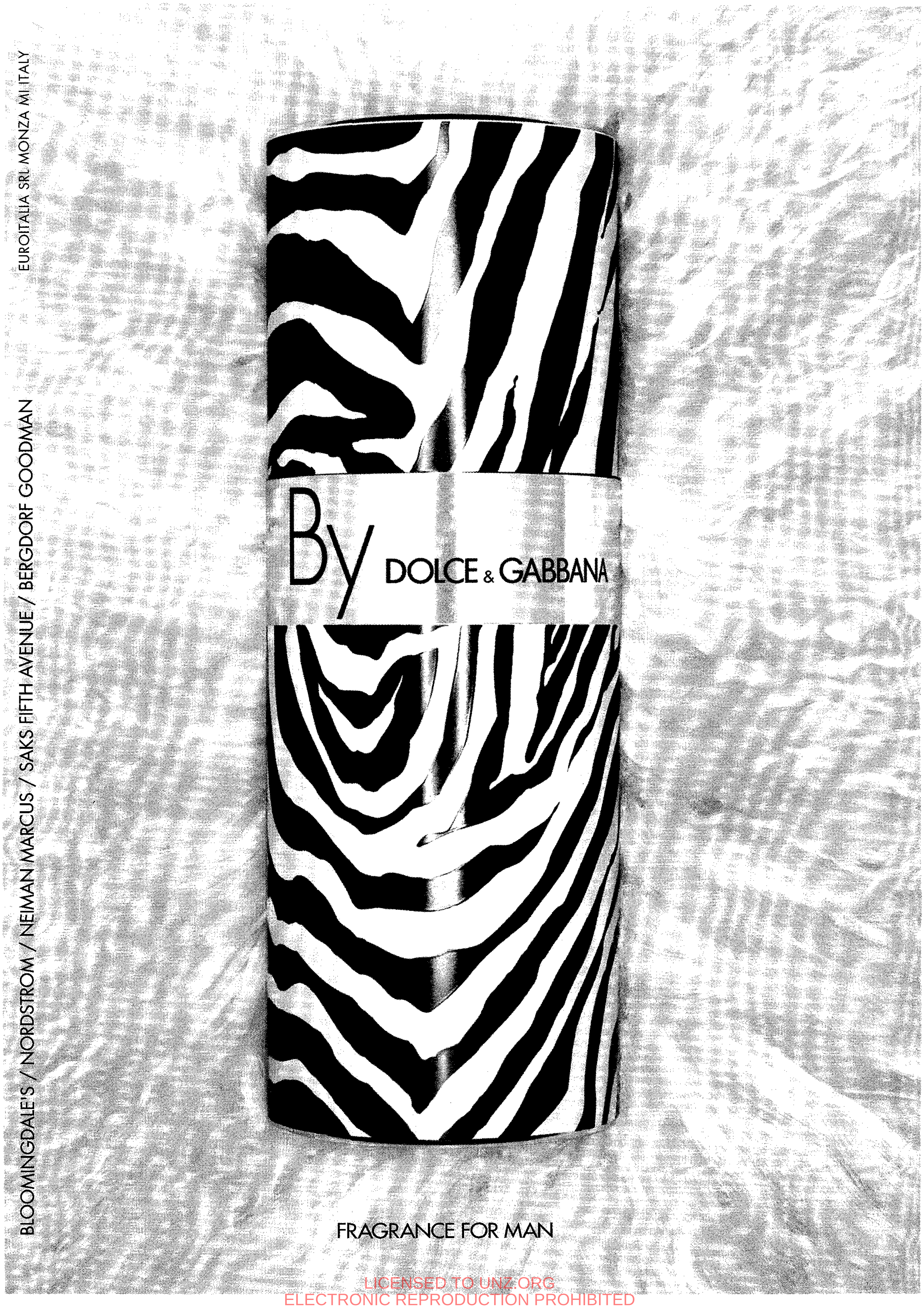
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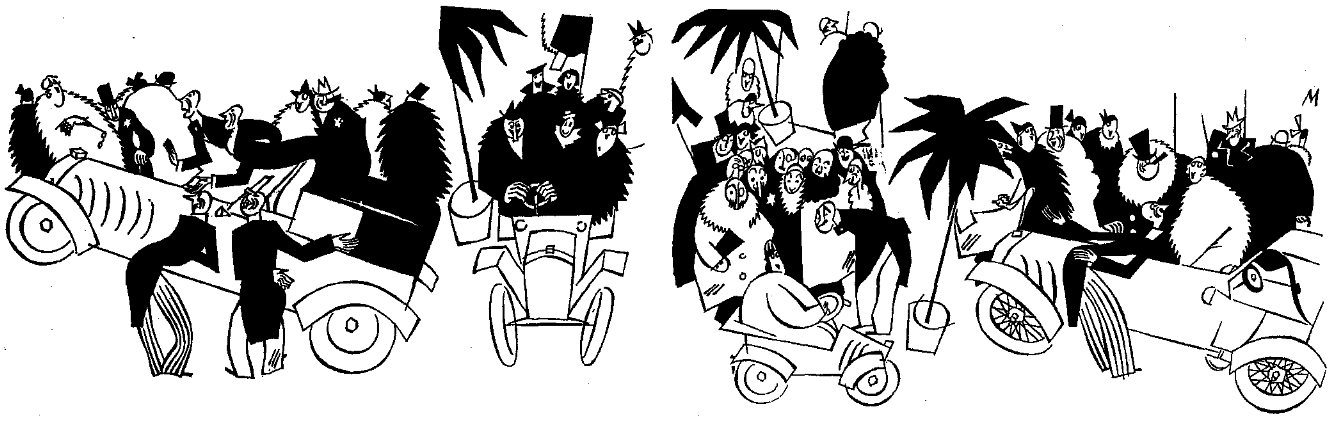

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ALICE IN BED
Susan Sontag's 1993 fantasy play, which was inspired by the journals of Henry and William James's sister, Alice. Previews begin Oct. 26. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

BETRAYAL
Juliette Binoche, Liev Schreiber, and John Slattery are the love triangle in Harold Pinter's 1980 psychological drama. David Leveaux is the director. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-9393.)

A CLASS ACT
The late Ed Kleban's life following his success as the lyricist of "A Chorus Line" is the basis of this musical, starring Carolee Carmello, Jonathan Freeman, Randy Graff, and Julia Murney. With music and lyrics by Mr. Kleban and a book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

COMIC POTENTIAL
Alan Ayckbourn's black comedy imagines a future in which robotlike beings work alongside actors in the film industry. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

DAHLING
Nan Schmid has the role of Tallulah Bankhead in a drama about the actress's life, in which seven other actors portray fifty-odd characters. In previews through Oct. 27. Opens Oct. 28 at 8. (Grove Street Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 358-5812.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
The latest edition of Gerard Alessandrini's ongoing musical satire of the players and the plays along the Great White Way. In previews through Oct. 29. Opens Oct. 30 at 7. (Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.)

THE FULL MONTY
A musical version of the 1997 movie. With a book by Terrence McNally and music and lyrics by David Yazbek. Jack O'Brien is the director. Two previews on Oct. 25. Opens Oct. 26 at 6:30. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

GAME SHOW
The audience members are part of the show in Jeffrey Finn and Bob Walton's interactive comedy. In previews. (45 Bleecker, at 45 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

HIGHWAY TO TOMORROW
Elevator Repair Service's latest show, based on Euripides' "Bacchae," incorporates choreography, found-object puppets, Afro-pop, and recorded sound effects. Paul Boocock, Randolph Curtis Rand, Rinne Groff, James Hannaham, and Susie Sokol are in the cast. In previews. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., at Spring St. 647-0202.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			25	26	27	28
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THE HOSTAGE
From the Irish Rep, Brendan Behan's 1958 black comedy, in which a British soldier is held captive by a former I.R.A. commander. Directed by Charlotte Moore. In previews through Oct. 28. Opens Oct. 29 at 7. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

RED ROSES AND PETROL
A woman in Dublin prepares for her husband's funeral and for the return of her children from England and America, in a drama by Joseph O'Connor. In previews. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 581-4125.)

THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW
Richard O'Brien's 1975 cult musical, directed by Christopher Ashley and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell, stars Dick Cavett, Lea DeLaria, Joan Jett, Daphne Rubin-Vega, Jarrod Emick, Alice Ripley, Raul Esparza, and Tom Hewitt. In previews. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

TABLETOP
In Rob Ackerman's real-time comedy, a behind-the-scenes look at television-commercial making, a domineering director and his crew create a product shot of a drink called Fruit Freeze! In previews through Oct. 29. Opens Oct. 30 at 7. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Charles Busch's satire of New York intellectual angst, staged by Manhattan Theatre Club, moves to Broadway. Linda Lavin, Tony Roberts, and Michele Lee star. Lynn Meadow is the director. In previews. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

THE BEGINNING OF AUGUST
Once again, Tom Donaghy dissects the modern fragmented family, but this time around he tries to put it back together again—a problematic strategy, given that the people themselves are also broken. The skewed, tentative way in which Donaghy's characters inhabit his upside-down world makes their isolation seem natural, so the redemptive ending makes no sense. Mary Steenburgen's performance, however—as a lonely widow who attempts to attach herself to her stepson's disintegrating family—is something to see. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200. Closes Nov. 12.)

BERLIN TO BROADWAY WITH KURT WEILL
A revue celebrating the composer's career, starring Lorinda Lisitza, Bjørn Olsson, Michael Winther, and Veronica Mittenzwei. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 239-6200.)

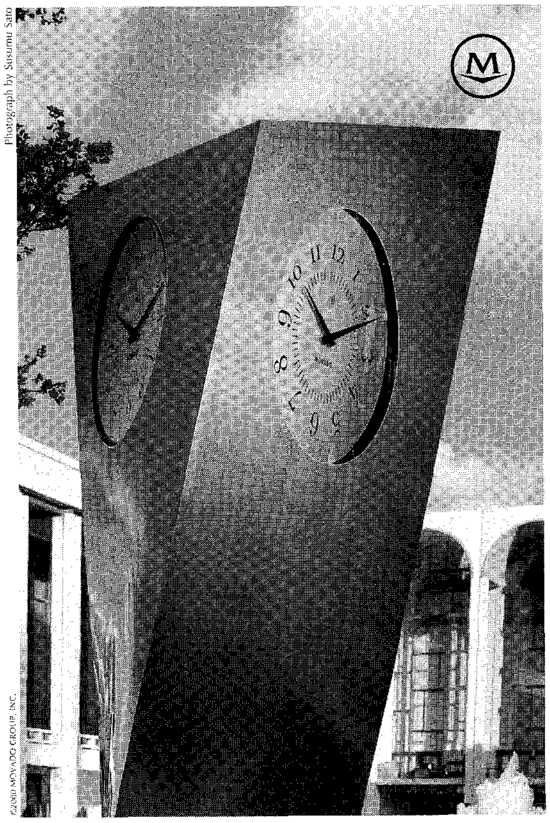
BIG POTATO
Opening the Jewish Repertory Theatre's season, a black comedy from Arthur Laurents, in which a Holocaust survivor from Kew Gardens, Queens, captures a Nazi war criminal in her beauty parlor. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Closes Nov. 5.)

THE CRUMPLE ZONE
A dark comedy by Buddy Thomas, set during a Christmas gathering of five gay men. (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 206-1515.)

THE DINNER PARTY
Len Cariou, Veanne Cox, Penny Fuller, Jan Maxwell, John Ritter, and Henry Winkler are in the cast of Neil Simon's new play, set in the private dining room of a Parisian restaurant. John Rando is the director. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DOLL
The camp company Theatre Couture puts its spin on Ibsen's "A Doll's House." Sherry Vine, Candis Cayne, David Ilku, and Mario Diaz are in the cast. With puppetry by Basil Twist. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

FOUR GUYS NAMED JOSÉ . . . AND UNA MUJER NAMED MARIA
This crowd-pleasing, crayon-colored revue of Latin song and dance is knowingly broad and hammy—imagine a sort of pan-Latin "Hee-Haw." The quartet of Josés (Philip Anthony, Henry Gainza, Allen Hidalgo, and Ricardo Puente) represent Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic; Maria (Lissette Gonzalez) is from Manhattan. After sending up the singers and songs that helped create Latin stereotypes (from Carmen Miranda's "I Make My Money with Bananas" to Ricky Martin's "Livin' La Vida Loca"), they deliver the remaining material—dance songs, songs of nostalgia for one's homeland, songs of love, songs about women named Maria—with exuberant wit and affection. The cast's talents are way too large for the small stage (although the lovely Ms. Gonzalez could use a few more sessions in the dance studio), and the accompaniment (a three-piece band) is terrific. (Blue Angel, 323 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)



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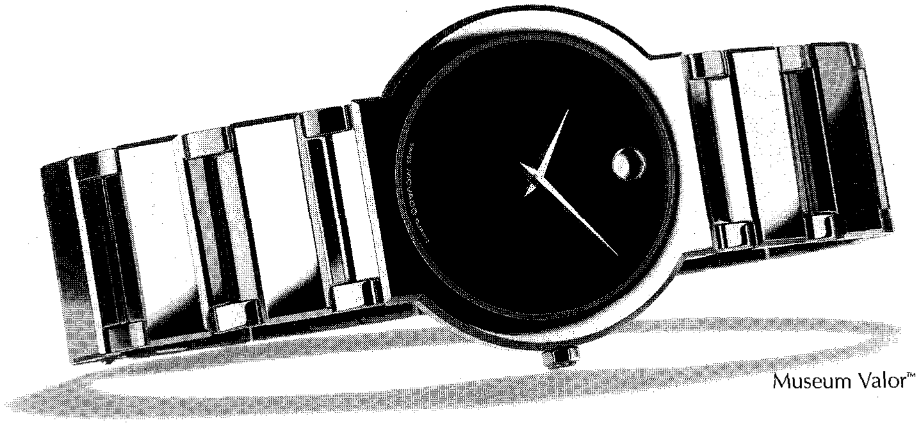

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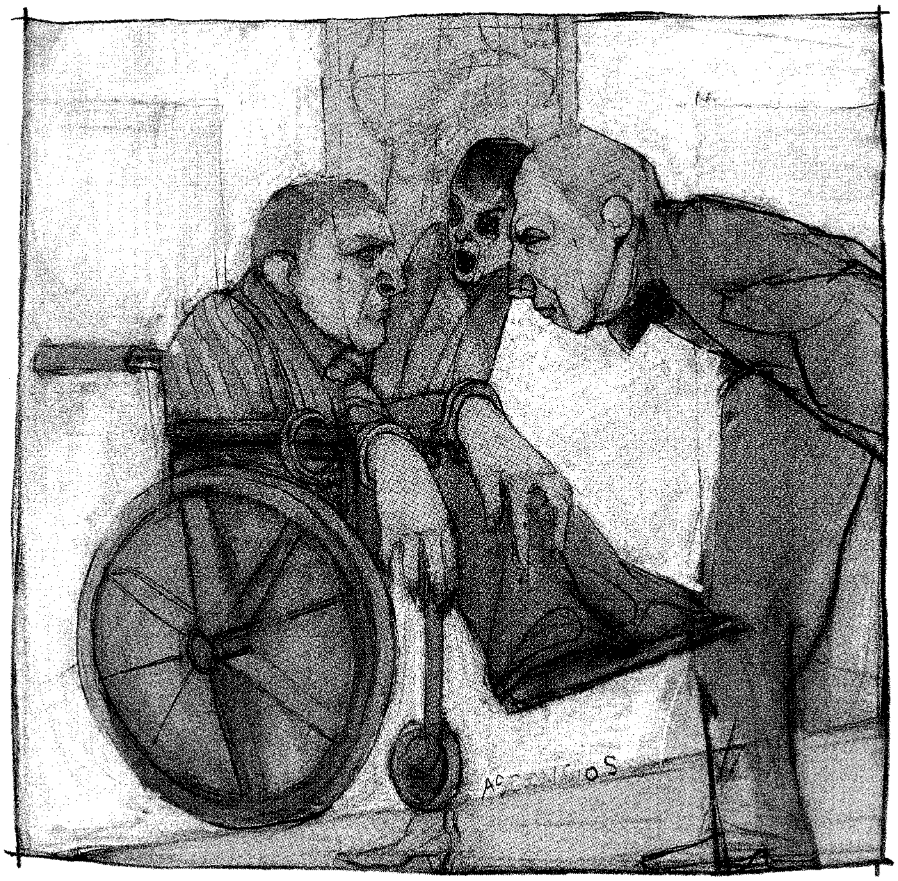


The Jewish Repertory Theatre's staging of "Big Potato," by Arthur Laurents.

GORE VIDAL'S THE BEST MAN
Gore Vidal's sophisticated, elegant, and damned entertaining 1960 play about the politics of politics, whose mots are as eerily accurate for Shrub and Al as they were, originally, for Adlai and Tricky Dick. Rather than a satire, the play is a comedy of manners (or, rather, of bad political manners) which shares with the eighteenth century an obsession with façade—its invention, manipulation, and exposure. Starring Charles Durning, Spalding Gray, Chris Noth, Elizabeth Ashley, Christine Ebersole, and Michael Learned, among others. Directed by Ethan McSweeny. (10/2/00) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

THE GOREY DETAILS
A musical inspired by the works of the author-illustrator Edward Gorey. With a score by Peter Matz and direction by Daniel Levans. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

HARD FEELINGS
A new comedy by Neena Beber, about a young woman in the throes of an identity crisis. (Women's Project Theatre, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200. Closes Nov. 4.)

IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES
A revue tracing the history of the musical form. With Charles Bevel, Carter Calvert, Debra Laws, Gregory Porter, Cheryl Alexander, and Michael Mandell. Jim Ehinger is the musical director. (B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, 243 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK
Sean O'Casey's 1924 comitragedy, in a Roundabout Theatre production. John Crowley is the director. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

LES MIZRAHI
The fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi sings, sews, dances, and gabs, in a Drama Dept. cabaret show directed by Richard Move. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

LIFEGAME
A show by the British troupe Improbable Theatre, in which a different onstage guest's life story becomes the basis of the improv drama each night. (Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

THE LIGHT OUTSIDE
From the Flea Theatre, a black domestic comedy by Kate Robins. (41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407.)

MARCEL MARCEAU
The silent Frenchman, performing solo and with his twelve-mime company. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Closes Nov. 12.)

THE MUSIC MAN
A delightful revival of Meredith Willson's 1957 musical, directed by Susan Stroman and starring Craig Bierko, who is making his Broadway début in the role of Professor Harold Hill. The show hits us with the simplicity and seamlessness of a perfect fairy tale, and it puts music in its proper place—right up there with all the other miracles of life. (5/22/00) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE
The Adobe Theatre Company's modern take on the Greek myth. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200.)

PROOF
The Manhattan Theatre Club's staging of David Auburn's drama, starring Mary-Louise Parker, is reopening on Broadway. Daniel Sullivan is the director. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

SNAPSHOTS 2000
The Worth Street Theatre's annual offering of one-acts this year includes plays by Robert O'Hara, Romulus Linney, Peter Hedges, Mark Novom, and Jeff Cohen. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 206-1515. Closes Oct. 29.)

STRANGER
In Craig Lucas's new play, two strangers with dicey pasts meet on a plane—a man fresh from a long prison term, who has given his life over to Jesus (David Strathairn), and a woman damaged by her liberal parents' neglect ("They just love their skis"), who has amply demonstrated her own capacity for doing damage (Kyra Sedgwick). Lucas has in the past memorably dramatized life's ambiguities, but the road he's taken here has led him into a thicket of dull incomprehensibility; the characters arrive at their destination at the end of the first act, but for the audience the entire play is a long trip to nowhere. Directed by Mark Brokaw. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303. Closes Nov. 5.)

THE SYRINGA TREE
A tour-de-force solo drama, written by and starring South African native and first-time playwright Pamela Gien, who gives an extraordinary performance in all twenty-three roles. It's a love story, really, about the strong, lasting bond between a white girl and her black nanny in South Africa. Told from the girl's point of view, the story starts when she is six, in 1965, and continues through the following twenty years of turbulent and violent upheavals over apartheid. The play, which is named for a tree common in South Africa, is emotionally powerful without being overtly political; audiences regularly emerge from the theatre crying. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)

TALLULAH HALLELUJAH!
The title of Tovah Feldshuh's biographical play about the stage-and-screen siren Tallulah Bankhead is taken from a cheer the crowd shouted as the actress cartwheeled across a London stage, putting "the roar in the Roaring Twenties." But Feldshuh, who also stars, has set the show in 1956, by which time Bankhead was well aware that she had turned herself into a joke in pursuit of her art. As the action opens, she's just flopped in a revival of "A Streetcar Named Desire"; nonetheless, she takes the stage at a U.S.O. benefit, where, as the evening goes on, she regales the audience with the lowdown on her life, several marvellous standards, and a bunch of charmingly dirty limericks. Though the show puts a bit too much faith in the sustaining power of applause, it is an engaging portrait of a woman who made herself make life a fun night out for whoever joined her. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

TEXTS FOR NOTHING
Bill Irwin directs and stars in his own adaptation of the prose works by Beckett. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210, ext. 10. Closes Nov. 6.)

THE UNEXPECTED MAN
Alan Bates and Eileen Atkins portray two strangers on a train—a famous novelist and his fan—in Yasmina Reza's latest play. Matthew Warchus is the director. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St.
254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

COPENHAGEN
Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE COUNTESS
Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave.,
at 14th St. 239-6200.

DIRTY BLONDE
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St.
239-6200.

JITNEY
Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St.
505-0700.

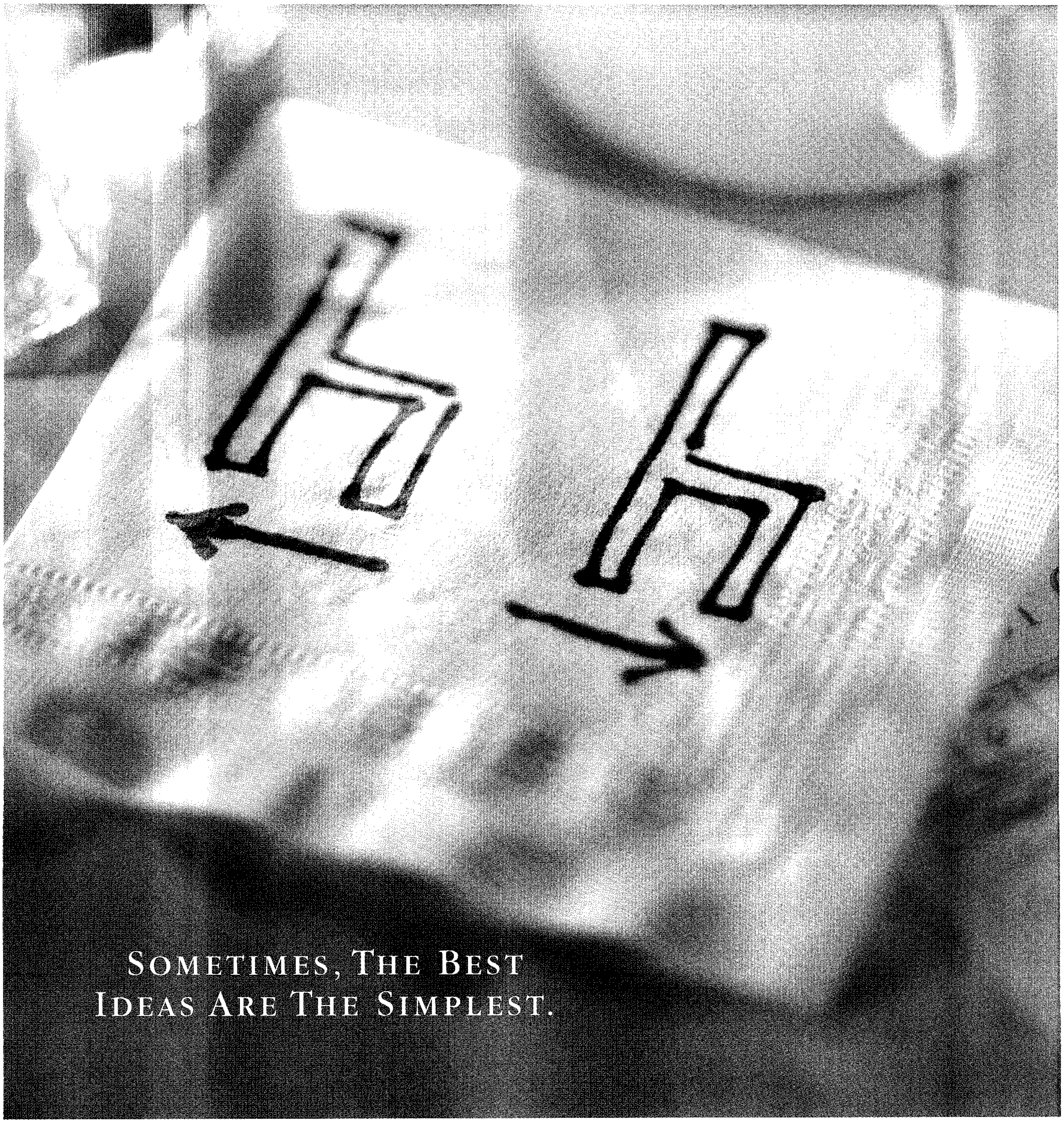
KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

SWING!
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

N. ASCENCIOS



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DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
Oct. 24 at 7: The opening-night gala. ♦ Oct. 25 at 8: "Theme & Variations," "Prodigal Son," and "Études." ♦ Oct. 26 at 8: "Diversion of Angels," a pas de deux from "Sleeping Beauty," "Baroque Game," and "Études." ♦ Oct. 27 at 8: "Diversion of Angels," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Weren't We Fools?," and "Prodigal Son." ♦ Oct. 28 at 2: "Theme & Variations," "Jardin aux Lilas," and "Études." ♦ Oct. 28 at 8: "Diversion of Angels," a pas de deux from "Sleeping Beauty," "Weren't We Fools?," and "Jabula." ♦ Oct. 29 at 2: "Prodigal Son," "Jardin aux Lilas," the Black Swan pas de deux, and "Études." ♦ Oct. 29 at 7:30: "Diversion of Angels," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Baroque Game," "Weren't We Fools?," and "Theme & Variations." ♦ Oct. 31 at 8: "Theme & Variations," "Baroque Game," "Meadow," and "Jabula." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through Nov. 5.)

"TREE"
The choreographer Ralph Lemon presents "Tree," the second segment of his "Geography Trilogy," with a cast of part-time farmers, drummers, club dancers, and teachers, who dance in styles both traditional (Balinese, Odissi, West African) and contemporary (house, postmodern). The rehearsals for such an effort required onstage translators; Lemon says, "Eighty-five per cent of what you're seeing is a result of mistranslation. Some things I could make happen, and sometimes I just let the misinterpretations become the work." Cultural juxtapositions are the meat of the work, so that it seems natural to find a folk musician from the Yunan province giving unprecedented accents to a Delta blues song. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Oct. 24 and Oct. 26-28 at 7:30.)

GARTH FAGAN DANCE
The company marks its thirtieth year with a retrospective of sorts, with revivals like "Of Night, Light, and Melanin," from 1981, and "Easter Freeway Processional," from 1983, as well as more recent work like "Woza" and "Two Pieces of One: Green," along with the première of "Trips and Twists." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Oct. 24-28 and Oct. 31 at 8, Oct. 29 at 2 and 7:30. Through Nov. 5.)

"NEW YORK ON NEW YORK"
Danspace Project and the Puffin Foundation present works devoted to urban themes by eleven New York choreographers. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Oct. 27-29 at 8:30.)

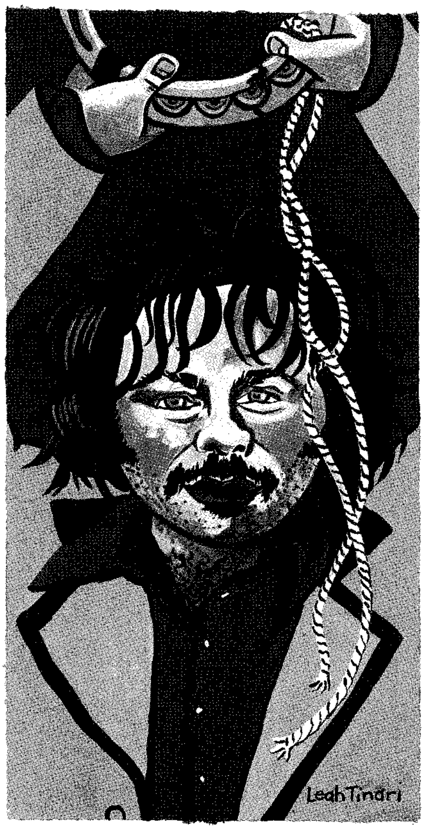
MUSIC AND DANCE OF BULGARIA
The ten-member ensemble Bulgari plays the dissonant harmonies and complex rhythms of its country's traditional music, offering examples from the various regions of its native land (Thrace, Shopluka, Rhodope, Dobruja, etc.) while two couples perform such folk dances as the winding *horo* and thump-and-slide *sborenka*. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Oct. 27 at 8.)

"AGAINST TYPE"
The choreographers Anita Cheng and Heather Harrington share a program; the former presents four works, including "Forecast," set to a live weather broadcast, and the latter presents three, including "Epiphany," a duet of sorts in which the choreographer counters her own movements as they appear in a projected image of herself figure skating. (Merce Cunningham Theatre, 55 Bethune St. 924-0077. Oct. 27 at 9 and Oct. 28-29 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

"A LOVE AFFAIR"
Ivan Lins is not about to replace Antonio Carlos Jobim as the archetypal Brazilian composer, but he certainly has a flair for melodies and a talent for piquant harmonies. A host of accommodating vocalists and instrumentalists, including **Vanessa Williams, Chaka Khan, Brenda Russell, Freddy Cole,** saxophonist **Dave Koz,** and Lins himself, offer the songs in all their tropical finery. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Oct. 25 at 8.)

CARNEGIE HALL JAZZ BAND
The vocalists **Bobby Short** and **Priscilla Baskerville** anchor a program celebrating the songs associated with Florence Mills, Adelaide Hall, and the Savoy Ballroom during the Harlem Renaissance. The poetry of Langston Hughes will be read. **Jon Faddis** is on trumpet. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Oct. 26 at 8.)



Martin Sexton, at Irving Plaza.

THE MIGHTY MIGHTY BOSSTONES
The ska revival was at its peak in 1997, when this Boston-based combo released its fifth album, "Let's Face It." The disk finally brought their stuttering, horn-driven sound, which mixes the well-tailored authenticity of the Specials with the nutty pop smarts of Oingo Boingo, to a wider audience. The group's latest album, "Pay Attention," continues in the same vein, and while the Bosstones may no longer be the latest fashion, singer Dicky Barrett can still cram plenty of blue-collar rage into a raucous two-minute anthem. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Oct. 28 at 7:30.)

OMARA PORTUONDO
Portuondo was the only woman to appear on the commercially triumphant "Buena Vista Social Club" album, and let's count our blessings that this seventy-year-old singer is back in the spotlight. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Oct. 28 at 8.)

ELLIOTT SMITH
The slacker troubadour earned an Academy Award nomination for his lachrymose work on the soundtrack to "Good Will Hunting," and his Oscar performance will be remembered forever for its strange sparseness: Smith, alone save his guitar, picked out his song shakily as the auditorium swallowed him up. This year, he released "Figure 8," another collection of lovesick, acoustic-guitar-driven murmurings, and re-created his Oscar-night performance at Town Hall, where he was as unassuming as ever. Happily, audiences seem to love his brand of anti-stardom. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Oct. 29 at 8.)

ALICE COOPER
The now middle-aged master of mayhem rings in Halloween with the usual tricks (a two-headed baby, a guillotine, fake blood), as well as a surprisingly good set of songs from his surprisingly good new album, "Brutal Planet." (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Oct. 31 at 7:30.)

MEDESKI MARTIN & WOOD
This spring the acid-jazz hipsters released a live album, "Tonic," which reinvented the group as a mainstream piano trio. Now they return with "The Dropper," which showcases their Grateful Dead space-set leanings. But this is no stale rehash of jam-band noodling; the album was produced by the hip-hop maestro Scotty Hard (Wu-Tang Clan), and it features the guitarist **Marc Ribot** as well as the occasional string section. Onstage they'll be joined by Ribot and the percussionist **Cyro Baptista,** so you can expect a wild night. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Oct. 31 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Oct. 26: Anyone who's heard the vocalist **Nora York** twist the martial rhythms and blues tonalities of Jimi Hendrix's epochal "Machine Gun" to fit her own sensibilities already knows that the kaleidoscopic compositions of Hendrix are perfect fodder for her radical reinterpretations.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
243 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Oct. 25: **Tab Benoit.** Located somewhere between Robben Ford and Stevie Ray Vaughan, this thirty-two-year-old Louisianan plays volcanic guitar and sings the blues like a crazed preacher. Oct. 26-27: Though **Little Feat** has never been the same since the death of its leader, Lowell George, in 1979, this great Southern-fried band always makes up in enthusiasm what it lacks in genius.

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Oct. 27: **Annie Haslam** and **Al Stewart.** The former singer of the precious seventies art-rock band Renaissance meets the man who gave the world "The Year of the Cat" during the dawn of the Carter Administration. Oct. 28: **Joe Ely.** Like his fellow-Texan Jimmie Dale Gilmore, this gritty singer-songwriter was a member of the infamous seventies group the Flatlanders, and he's still a square peg caught in country rock's round holes.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Oct. 30: The **Sneaker Pimps.** Sprung from the late-nineties trip-hop revolution that brought fame to such better-known practitioners as Tricky and Portishead, this Reading, England, trio specializes in fractured, downtempo grooves and the vampish sulking of vocalist Kelli Dayton.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Oct. 27-28: The thirty-three-year-old singer-songwriter **Martin Sexton** comes to town in support of his latest album, "Wonder Bar," his second major-label release and a superb example of a recording artist coming into his own. Sexton exhibits a fresh and spontaneous folk-rock sensibility, and his well-respected live performances are characterized by his ability to use his entire body as a conductor for his powerful vocals.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Oct. 29: **Idaho,** a cult favorite from the "sad-core" school of rock and roll (a class that includes such modern-day mopers as Low, Sparklehorse, and the Red House Painters). The band, which is really just a front for the gifted Los Angeles songwriter Jeff Martin (Los Angeles, of course, is not located in Idaho), has been making delightfully morose pop music with little commercial impact since the early nineties. Oct. 31: The **Rachel's.** On its latest album, "Full On Night," this

LEAH TINARI

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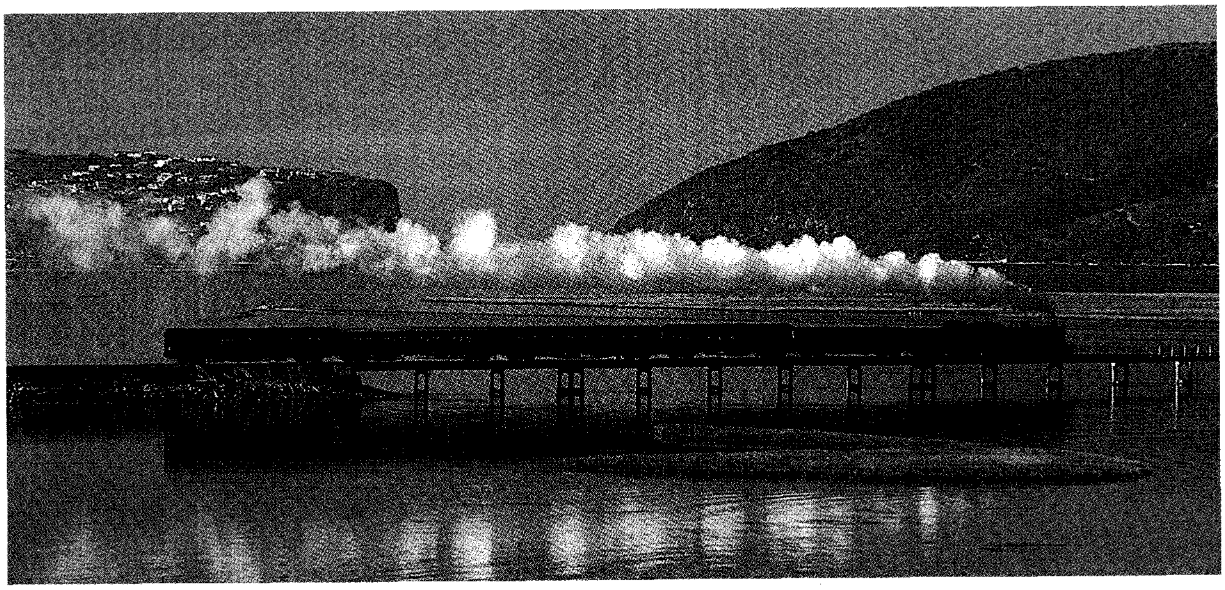

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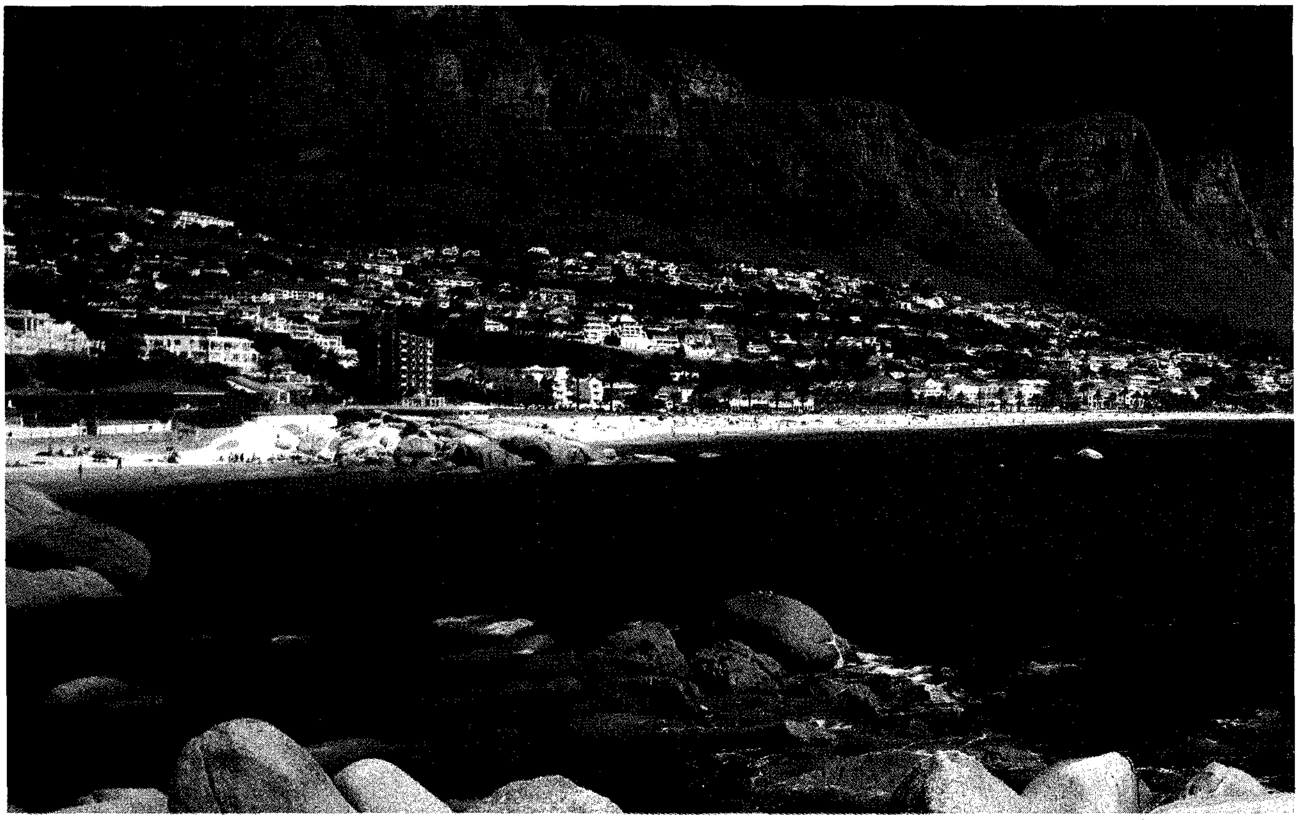

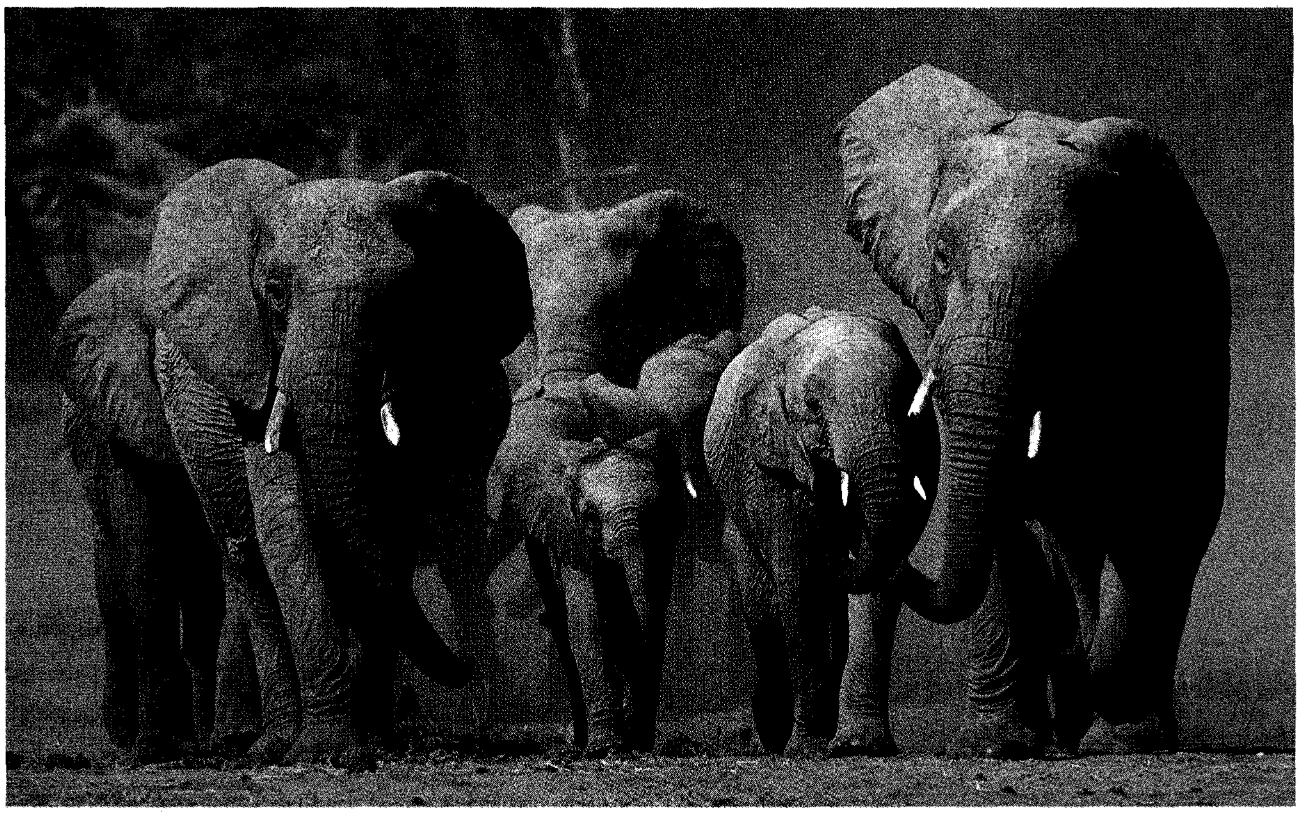

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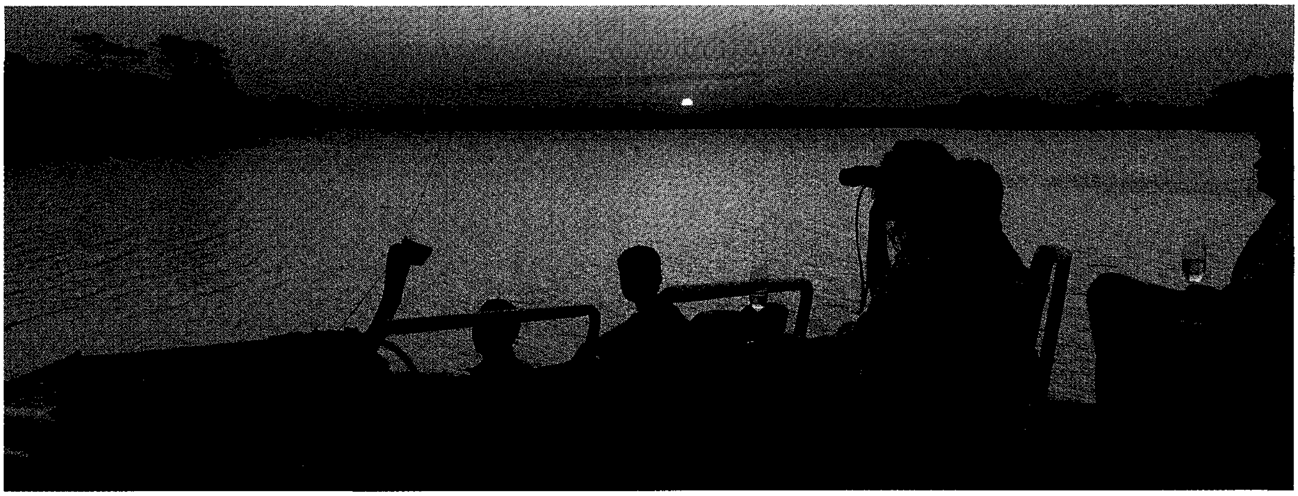

africa.net

SMOKE SCREENS *The artist Tony Oursler specializes in the techno-spooky—a recent work transformed a Whitney room into a gallery-size camera obscura complete with hellfire and a devil made of handblown glass. His latest extravaganza, "The Influence Machine," moves his signature phantasmagoria into Madison Square Park every night, until Halloween, from sunset to 9 P.M. In the piece, photographed here by Robert Polidori, which has been organized by the Public Art Fund, a squadron of techies man smoke machines and swivelling video projectors: disembodied faces appear as if on the wind, speaking to the citizenry from the smoke.*

instrumental post-rock orchestra collaborates with the experimental electronic musicians and close friends Drew Daniel and Martin Schmidt, who record as **Matmos.** This resulted in two new versions of the title song, a lengthy composition that was originally released on the Rachel's début album, "Handwriting." The Rachel's rendition is marked by voluptuous organ melodies, wailing violins, and heavy guitars. Matmos, in keeping with its reputation for translating country and folk into avant-garde electronica, refashions the song into a radically different soundscape. The two groups share the stage tonight.

MAXWELL'S

1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Oct. 28: **Dave Alvin.** "Public Domain: Songs from the Wild Land," the latest album by the former heart and soul of L.A.'s early-eighties roots-rock pioneers, the Blasters, reworks covers of such traditional classics as "Shenandoah" and "Walk Right In." Like everything else Alvin has recorded, the album is very American—and very good.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Oct. 27: **Dave Alvin** (see Maxwell's). Oct. 28-29: **Jack Lukeman,** a former auto mechanic turned Emerald Isle pop phenom, is a noirish balladeer reminiscent of Nick Cave.

WETLANDS

161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Oct. 27-28: **Ozric Tentacles,** who hail from England, play laid-back instrumental music rife with Middle Eastern scales and ouzo-flavored references, which makes them a tad more interesting than your average hippies.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ARCI'S PLACE

450 Park Ave. S., between 30th and 31st Sts. (532-4370)—Through Nov. 4: **Wesla Whitfield.** Don't expect this elegant stylist to dig into the blues, but if refined interpretations of the great American songbook are for you, Whitfield will satisfy most of your needs.

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—A young guitarist with chops to spare, **Mark Whitfield** (here with his trio Oct. 26-28) has the funky fluidity of a pre-pop George Benson bolstered by a deep vein of gospel and blues. His recent release "Raw" is an unadorned live recording that catches Whitfield at his most impassioned and hints at the six-string commotion he can regularly churn up. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and **Bobby Short.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Barbara Carroll** is in attendance.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—**Barbara Cook** is in command of this urbane dinner-and-music room through Nov. 25. Her voice remains almost defiantly that of the nineteen-fifties Broadway ingénue, and her material is as winning as a gardenia corsage. Dining.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—The pianist **Makoto Ozone** (here with his trio through Oct. 29) is best known for his long-standing partnership with the master vibraphonist Gary Burton, whom he hooked up with at the Berklee School of Music in the early eighties. But Ozone has also displayed more than enough vigor and finesse to stand as his own man. Dining.

KNICKERBOCKER

33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Oct. 25-28: Whether providing just-right accompaniment for the likes of such bebop patriarchs as James Moody or the late Milt Jackson or keeping the tradition alive through his own impressive recitals and recordings, the pianist **Mike LeDonne** remains one of the true defenders of the faith on the New York scene.

KNITTING FACTORY

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Oct. 27-29: Where would new jazz be in New York City without **Mark Dresser's** ubiquitous presence? Often found manhandling

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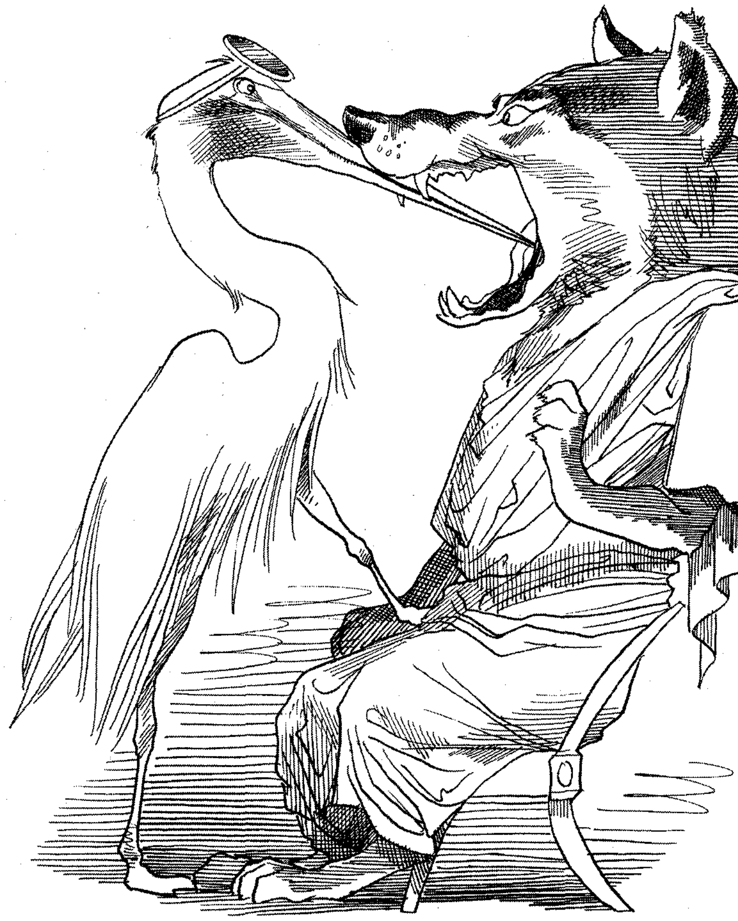
his bass in an attempt to elicit as yet unheard sounds, Dresser can drive a band with fruitful rhythms and imaginative tonalities. He deserves the spotlight, and this week gets it.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Oct. 29: The **Sherman Irby** quartet. An alto saxophonist whose rhythmic independence and friendly tone set him apart from the crowd, Irby has made his presence known in ensembles ranging from Roy Hargrove's sextet and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra to his own lean, quick-witted small group. The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra holds sway on Mondays.



"The Wolf and the Heron," from illustrations by David Levine of characters from Aesop's fables, at the Foundation for Hellenic Culture.

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MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"The Year One: Art of the Ancient World East and West."** Just when millennium hoopla seems like yesterday's news, the Met saunters in with its own elegant and understated take, a selection of antiquities from the permanent collection, all of which were created around 1 A.D. In contrast to recent extravaganzas at other New York museums, the Met judiciously allocates just a few first-floor galleries to the show. The curators' aim is to illustrate the cultural cross-pollination brought about by trade and the expansion of empires, a phenomenon heralded in the first sculpture here, a magnificent life-size bronze statue of a Roman boy, rendered in Rhodes. The show follows the course of influence from east to west, through Rome and its Gallic and Celtic outposts to Iran, India, China, and Southeast Asia, and it concludes, ponderously, with a handful of pre-Columbian relics from the Americas. Among the many highlights are a group of Roman frescoes, re-creating a bedroom in Agrippa's imperial villa, black as night and graced by impossibly delicate trompe-l'oeil details. Through Jan. 14. ♦ **"Art and the Empire City"** presents paintings, photographs, and decorative art from one of New York's early periods of irrational exuberance, between the completion of the Erie Canal, in 1825, and the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes."** Through Feb. 4. ♦ **"The Divine Comtesse"** presents photographs, by Pierre-Louis Pierson, of the Countess de Castiglione (1837-99). Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Queen Victoria and Thomas Sully"** gathers the oil portraits, oil sketches, drawings, and other ephemera connected with the preparation of the full-length portrait (also on view) by Sully, the British-born Philadelphia artist. Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Open Ends,"** the third and final installment of **"MOMA 2000,"** the yearlong exhibition devoted to the art of the past century, covers art from 1960 to the present. Like its predecessors, the current show is itself divided into segments; this first one includes several large-scale works and installations, by Cai Guo-Qiang, James Rosenquist, Pipilotti Rist, Cindy Sherman, and Gerhard Richter, which suggests the themes that the later segments will amplify. Through Jan. 2. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—One design icon salutes another: the Goog devotes its spiralling interior court to an exhibition that measures the impact of Giorgio Armani, the original relaxed-fit couturier. Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Amazons of the Avant-Garde"** is a modest survey of six women painters, each of whom played a vital role in the evolution of the Russian jeunesse dorée. Through Jan. 7. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

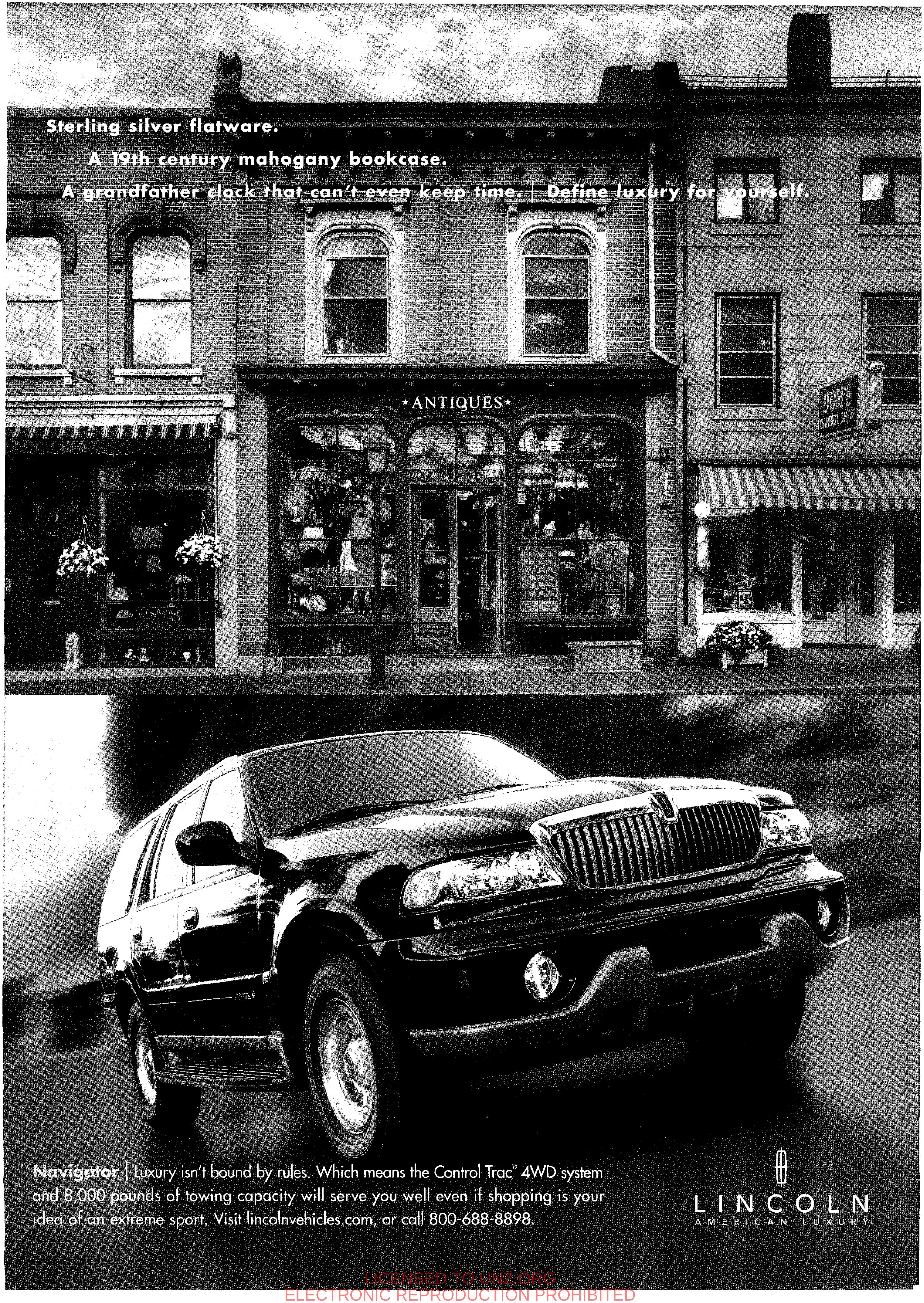
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The museum presents the first full-scale retrospective devoted to the photographer Edward Steichen in forty years. Through Feb. 4. ♦ **"Lovely Life: The Recent Work of Agnes Martin."** Through Oct. 29. ♦ **"Roni Horn: Still Water (The River Thames, for Example), 1999."** Through Jan. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—**"Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga"** marks the millennial anniversary of the Viking North American landing with an exhibition of such artifacts as graffiti, plunder, a reconstructed longboat, a Norse penny, and a variety of dioramas. Through Jan. 21. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—How could one not root for Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock's tough-minded, long-suffering widow? It's occasionally been suggested that she was the better artist; one wants to believe it. Sadly, however, the current retrospective leaves a feeling of qualified appreciation rather than excitement. From her cocky, sultry self-portrait at twenty-two to the Hoffmanesque abstractions of the forties, Krasner's early works glow with talent and youthful promise. Unfortunately, so do the later works. Despite their confident scale and rolling, Matissean shapes, most of the big canvases feel graphic, dry, and frequently repetitious. In hindsight, Krasner's career was the opposite of her husband's brief blaze-up. Her talent smoldered for decades but seldom managed to ignite. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Hip-Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes, and Rage"** presents videos, clothing and accessories, manuscripts of lyrics, F.B.I. letters, magazine covers, and installations that catalogue reactions to the genre. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Gold of the Nomads: Scythian Treasures from Ancient Ukraine."** Through Jan. 21. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

DAHESH MUSEUM
601 Fifth Ave., at 49th St. (759-0606)—With **"Orientalism,"** the Dahesh sets out to explore a subset of its specialty: academic art. The show includes several paintings not only reprised from their last show but placed exactly where viewers saw them last, most notably Gustav Baurenfie's "Jaffa, Recruiting of Turkish Soldiers," along with Jose Tapiro Baro's "Tangerian Beauty" and Edwin Longsden Long's "Love's Labour's Lost." The repetition, meant to point up the works' connections to different contexts, also serves to highlight the limitations of the museum's gallery space and of the academic canon. The movement, no matter how energetically revived, remains far, far from the past century's artistic fashions, whether or not one thinks of them as advances. Through Dec. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (369-4880)—**"Rave Reviews: American Art and Its Critics."** In 1825, when the National Academy of Design was established, there were no American art critics, a condition that may sound to some like Eden before apple season. This show traces the evolution of a national art criticism by pairing a selection from the Academy's influential annual exhibitions, one per year from 1826 through 1925, with wall text detailing that work's reception in the press. The critical assessments are often spot on; one detractor dubbed "The Great Adirondack Pass," a lumpen landscape by Charles Ingham, "The Great Abominable Pass." Apart from the curatorial premise, the show is essentially a survey of the Academy's first century and includes a stunning South American landscape by Frederic Edwin Church, a wry Venetian street scene by a young John Singer Sargent, and a lively Childe Hassam painting of a flag-filled parade down Fifth Avenue. Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5, and Fridays, 10 to 6.)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GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

LAWREN STEWART HARRIS
A frostier version of Rockwell Kent, Harris (1885-1970) was one of Canada's best-known modernist painters. Like Kent, Harris staked out the great North as his subject, treating snowy shorelines, crags, and clouds with melodramatic simplicity. The results, though unfailingly handsome, are almost comedically solemn. One half-expects a sleigh and reindeer to come soaring over the wintry summit of "Isolation Peak." Harris's later abstractions are full of busy linear forms, most of which illustrate his Theosophical convictions. Through Nov. 5. (Americas Society, 680 Park Ave., at 68th St. 249-8950.)

DAVID LEVINE
Some years ago, the caricaturist and *New Yorker* contributor illustrated an edition of the fables of Aesop. Exhibited together for the first time, Levine's fifty ink drawings form a wry menagerie of scheming lions, foxes, donkeys, athletes, and demigods. Several of the two-legged types look strangely familiar: Hermes, for instance, bears a striking resemblance to John Updike. For all their narrative condensation and humor, however, the drawings' chief pleasures are visual. Levine's line, articulate and agile, emerges from thickets of cross-hatching to locate a philosopher's cheekbone or a lion's eyelash. Through Nov. 11. (Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 7 W. 57th St. 308-6908.)

HENRI MICHAUX
More than sixty works on paper by an artist and poet obsessed with unlocking the unconscious mind. Included are several drawings created in the late fifties under the influence of mescaline, an experience Michaux described as a "retinal circus." The most striking is a small diptych on black paper, its wobbly aggregate of staccato pencil marks stacked crazily up each page like the Watts Towers. Michaux was drawn to visual art as a means of going beyond words, yet his ink drawings, with their shades of calligraphy, chromosomes, and Rorschach blots, suggest an undiscovered language. Through Nov. 25. (Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 988-1623.)

"REMBRANDT: THE VENETIAN INFLUENCE"
Nobody doubts that Venetian painterliness, above all the example of Titian, had a decisive effect on Rembrandt's late style. If the twelve works on view here don't really tell the story of that influence, it hardly matters, given their extraordinary quality. Three of the four Rembrandts are major works borrowed from museums (including a sparkling Hals-like boy with a pubescent mustache, on loan from the Nelson-Atkins Museum); the fourth, a sombre, luminous portrait of the apostle James at prayer, is in a style close to that of the Frick's "Polish Rider." Among the Venetian works are a trio of muscular half-length Christ figures by Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese. The only disappointment is a recently "rediscovered" portrait of Francesco Duodo. Was it in fact painted by Titian, as the catalogue affirms? Duodo himself looks sternly skeptical; viewers may feel likewise. Through Nov. 18. (Salander O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606.)

Short List

PHYLLIS BRAMSON
Littlejohn, 41 E. 57th St. 980-2323.
Through Nov. 11.

JOHN DUBROW
Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606.
Through Nov. 18.

WHITFIELD LOVELL
DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
247-2111. Through Nov. 11.

ARIC OBROSEY
Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St.
535-5767. Through Nov. 4.

CHARLES PARNESS
Fischbach, 24 W. 57th St. 759-2345.
Through Oct. 28.

ADAM STRAUS
Haime, 41 E. 57th St. 888-3550.
Through Nov. 4.

DAVID TRUE
De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.
Through Nov. 18.

TABITHA VEVERS
Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
307-5730. Through Nov. 11.

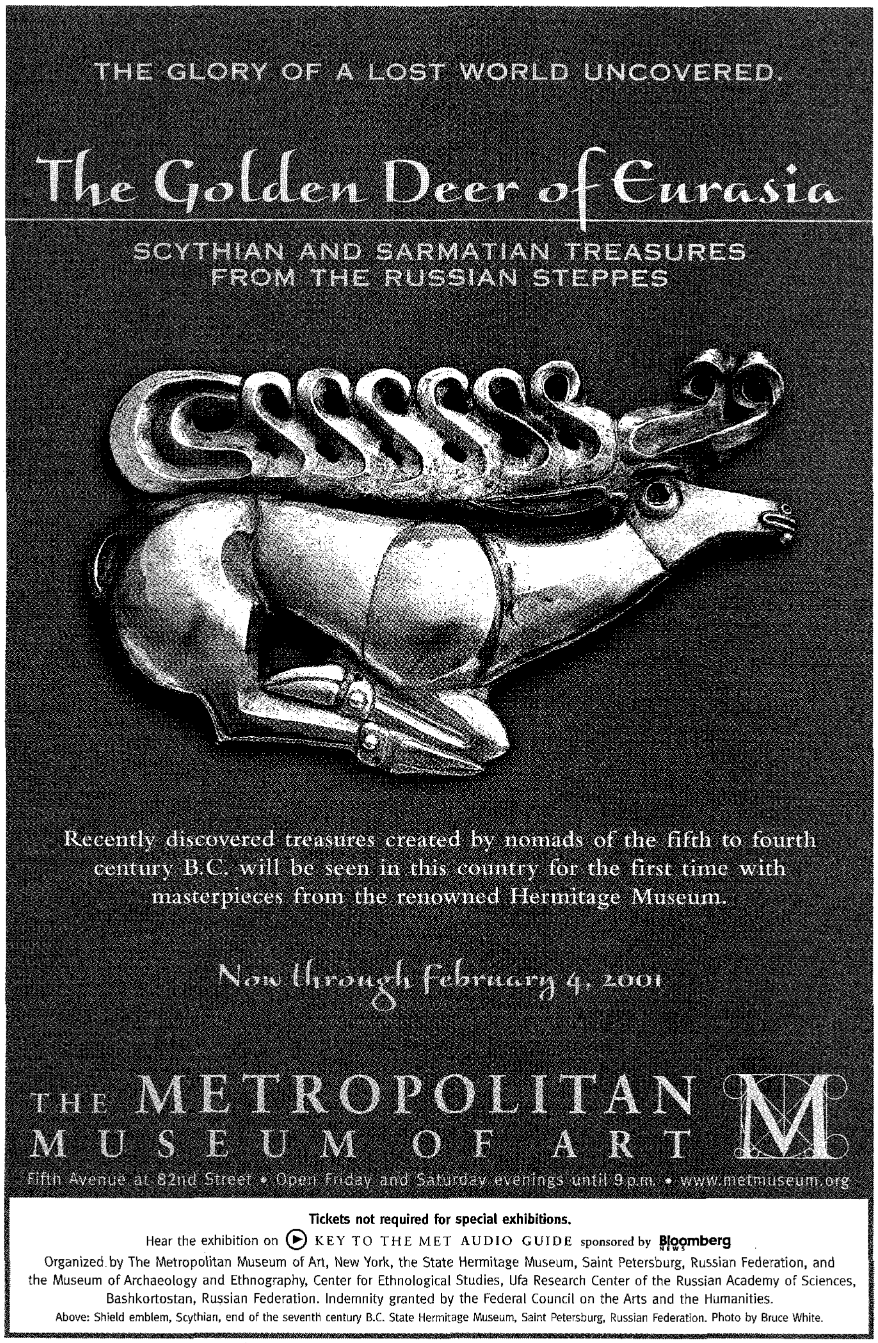
BILL VIOLA
James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 255-7171.
Through Nov. 25.

ANDREW ZEGA AND BERND H. DAMS
Didier Aaron, 32 E. 67th St. 988-5248.
Through Nov. 4.

MARIA MAGDALENA Z'GRAGGEN
Roger Smith, 501 Lexington Ave., at 47th St.
832-8831. Through Nov. 13.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

DELIA BROWN
The New York début of a Los Angeles artist who paints scenes of beautiful people looking fabulous, either poolside or in the type of hotel suite routinely trashed by rock stars. That the images look filched from the pages of *Vogue* is no accident. Brown scouts locations, casts models (often including herself), and styles photo shoots in undeviating imitation of fashion spreads, though she throws in enough art-historical references to let us know she means business. Her medium of choice is watercolor; its wispiness is a perfect match for the vapid subject matter. Swarming with brand names, from Moët & Chandon to Gucci, this is painting as product placement. Through Nov. 4. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460.)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Above: Shield emblem, Scythian, end of the seventh century B.C. State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation. Photo by Bruce White.

TABLES FOR TWO

BAMBOU
243 E.14th (358-0012)—If any New York restaurant deserves to be called an oasis, it's this smart Caribbean spot on a no-man's stretch of Fourteenth Street, hidden behind a green awning with no name on it. The shadow-box window display hints at a bamboo garden behind the carved mahogany door, but it doesn't prepare you for the surprise of entering what could be the private domain of one of Jamaica's great coffee planters. The green-and-white veranda-like space is outfitted with slow-turning ceiling fans, a long copper-sheathed bar, clay pots full of coconuts, a rattan chaise and a deep sofa for settling into a game of dominoes, and pale curtains that tumble voluptuously to the floor. Bambou is the highly personal creation of a Paris-educated Haitian architect named Jean-Claude Samuel, who has refined the earthiness of West Indian fare with subtle elements of tropical sweetness. Steamed mussels are dressed in a gentle coconut-curry broth. The inevitable crab cake is enlivened by the addition of avocado butter, chive oil, and balsamic-molasses syrup. Pork chops are smoked, then perked up with a beet-and-watercress salad in a dressing of beer and honey. A simple prime shell steak becomes exotic when seasoned with Arawak spices and accompanied by fried plantains. The beat of island music emanates from somewhere behind a spectacular display of rain-forest foliage, but don't expect a steel band to arrive suddenly. Bambou's idea of a Caribbean getaway is summed up by the restaurant's signature drink—the Bambou Martini, a pale-gold mixture of Haitian rum and Lillet, served straight up with a lemon twist. It's the closest thing to liquid sunshine imaginable. (Entrées $18-$26. Open daily for dinner.)

—*Charles Michener*

Short List

CARL ANDRE / ZOE LEONARD
Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Andre through Nov. 18; Leonard through Nov. 21.
SERENA BOCCHINO
Coploff, 526 W. 26th St. 741-1149.
Through Nov. 11.
STEVE DE FRANK
Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937.
Through Nov. 11.
DAMIEN HIRST
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.
Through Dec. 16.
BEATRIZ MILHAZES
Thorp, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 691-6565.
Through Nov. 25.
MANUEL OCAMPO
Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701.
Through Nov. 11.
MATTHEW RITCHIE
Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.
Through Nov. 25.
TONY TASSET
Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.
Through Nov. 25.
JULIA VON EICHEL
Grimm, 505 W. 28th St. 564-7662.
Through Oct. 28.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

"STREET MARKET"
Two of this group show's three artists, Todd James and Stephen Powers, have had run-ins with the law due to their previous work—graffiti. James was picked up by the vandals unit of the N.Y.P.D. across the street from the gallery before this show opened. Now that the ruckus is over, the setup—a startlingly real installation of storefronts, extensively painted vehicles, and allegedly found signs—can be eerily quiet. The high walls of Deitch's recently opened second space are covered with billboards, and the underfurnished shops are stocked with mock products, including cans of street cred, which James, Powers, and their collaborator, Barry McGee, seem to have in good supply, as long as they can stay in trouble. Through Dec. 2. (18 Wooster St. 343-7300.)
JOHAN GRIMONPREZ
This show supposedly marks the launch of *Inflight*, a big, glossy publication devoted to the history of hijackings, packaged complete with barf bag and a flight-safety instruction card. The magazine, to be given away to travellers, includes trivia from the first recorded hijacking, in the nineteen-thirties, and excerpts from such relevant texts as Palestinian terrorist Leila Khaled's memoirs and "The Official Alien Abductee's Handbook." The instruction card, whose symbols are translated inside the magazine, includes the suggestion "Don't be a hero"—a crossed-out Superman logo—and advice on how to converse with your captors: speak only when spoken to. The monthlong launch party includes a waiting room full of blown-up *Inflight* graphics and a pirate-radio soundtrack, transmitted lightly enough that it only reaches a few well-placed boom boxes. Through Nov. 4. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

Short List

PEDRO BARBEITO
Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St.
965-0753. Through Nov. 11.
JAMES ESBER
P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642.
Through Nov. 11.
CHRIS HIEBERT
Kramarsky, 560 Broadway. 966-6601.
Through Nov. 11.
MARY ESCH
Bronwyn Keenan, 3 Crosby St. 431-5083.
Through Nov. 11.
JASON RHOADES
Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.
Through Nov. 18.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Oct. 25: Watches and clocks, including rare work by Koehn, Patek Philippe, and Audemars Piguet. ♦ Oct. 28: Posters from the world of movies. Among the star lots are one of just two copies of the Expressionist artist Josef Fenneker's German poster for the original "King Kong," a withdrawn poster for Frank Capra's "Lost Horizon" by James Montgomery Flagg (famous for his Uncle Sam "I Want You" recruiting posters), and two extremely rare lithographs promoting Fritz Lang's "Metropolis." ♦ Oct. 31: Important nineteenth-century European paintings, drawings, and sculpture by Bouguereau, Meissonier, Moreau, and others. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)
CHRISTIE'S
"Magnificent Jewels" is the theme for two days of auctions. Oct. 25-26 at 10 A.M.: A variety of offerings, including a thirty-five-carat Kashmir sapphire and a rectangular-cut thirty-two-carat diamond ring. ♦ Oct. 25: Two auctions of items from the collection of the Baroness di Portanova: jewels and objets d'art designed by Bulgari, Cartier, Massoni, and Marina B (at 2), and "Russian Works of Art and Objects of Virtue," by Fabergé (at 6). ♦ Oct. 26 at 2: "The Contemporary Jeweler," works with a fantastical bent by Ralph Esmerian, Daniel Brush, Carnet, James Taffin de Givenchy, and William Goldberg. ♦ Oct. 31-Nov. 1 at 10 A.M. and 2: A sale of prints from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including work by Bonnard, Picasso, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Jasper Johns. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

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CHRISTIE'S EAST
An auction of nineteenth-century furniture, sculpture, ceramics, and works of art. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400. Oct. 31.)

SWANN
An auction of books, cards, posters, and other memorabilia relating to magicians and their craft, including the justly famous (Houdini, Thurston) and the delightfully obscure (Samri S. Baldwin, "The White Mahatma.") (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Oct. 26.)

INTERNATIONAL FINE ART AND ANTIQUE DEALERS SHOW
Oct. 25-26: The conclusion of this year's offerings: seventy-three American and European dealers of antiquities, furniture, paintings, and other objects, and a special loan exhibition of sixteen "mystery clocks" by the house of Cartier. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 67th St. 642-8572.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

CHARMAINE CAIRE
Some of these saturated-color pictures of doll and toy dioramas are predictably dark—one melodramatic vignette shows a father figure there in one frame, then missing from the next. Others are excellent, particularly two scenes that play with scale—plastic flies marching over tin cars at the drive-in and plastic birds dwarfing a miniature garden, drinking from its complex plastic water features. Caire's toy subjects look better in this colorful chaos than in the scripted dollhouse interactions. Through Nov. 4. (Exhibit A, 160 Mercer St. 343-0230.)

JOAN FONTCUBERTA
This Spanish artist is showing work in two mediums of his own devising: the lactogram, for which nursing mothers express breast milk onto acetate negatives, and the hemogram, which uses drops of blood. It's not necessary to puzzle out Fontcuberta's weighty explanations for these techniques, which are full of good intentions and theoretical claims, to enjoy the otherworldly beauty of his large prints; the best hemograms look like million-dollar sashimi. More conventional black-and-white prints of Braille text, with the feel of sci-fi moonscapes, fill out the room. Through Nov. 1. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223.)

SCOTT PETERMAN
Peterman's Maine winter landscapes show the harshest season's minimalist and sometimes surreal qualities. In "Lower Bay II" a square white ice-fishing shack appears to float above the fields of snow and frost; the only color is a red heart on an "I Love Maine Coons" sticker. In "Nonesuch River" the frozen water is an eerily empty green-and-white stage, inscribed by the tracks of a vehicle that entered and exited stage right. Winter may feel unwelcome now, but Peterman evokes the season's aesthetic potential. Through Nov. 11. (Silverstein, 520 W. 21st St. 929-4300.)

NICOLE TRAN BA VANG
Tran Ba Vang, who lives and works in Paris, produces semiannual collections of work to coincide with fashion week there. This season's series of digitally altered photographs appear to show models taking off second skins: bras with hard nipples on them, a wrinkled torso corset with a belly button. A few images give themselves away—one pair of oddly constructed leg-mimicking boots has ankles unrealistically wide for the models on show, while a pair of flesh panties is clearly just a bare behind. Through Nov. 11. (Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219.)

"A GENIUS FOR PLACE"
Though this show's subtitle, "American Landscapes of the Country Place Era," posits a somewhat dubious epoch (it's not what most historians call the period from 1895 to 1942), the estate landscapes showcased in Carol Betsch's recently commissioned prints are undoubtedly worth seeing. A small selection of garden-furniture props includes one magnifying-glass sundial of British manufacture, designed to burn a hole in an hour-marked sheet of paper. Through Dec. 1. (PaineWebber, 1285 Sixth Ave., at 51st St. 713-2885. Closed Saturdays.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—**"Eugène Atget: The Pioneer."** Through Jan. 21. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

ANDREW BUSH
Julie Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 627-2410.
Through Dec. 12.

LUCINDA DEVLIN
Rodgers, 529 W. 20th St. 414-9810.
Through Nov. 4.

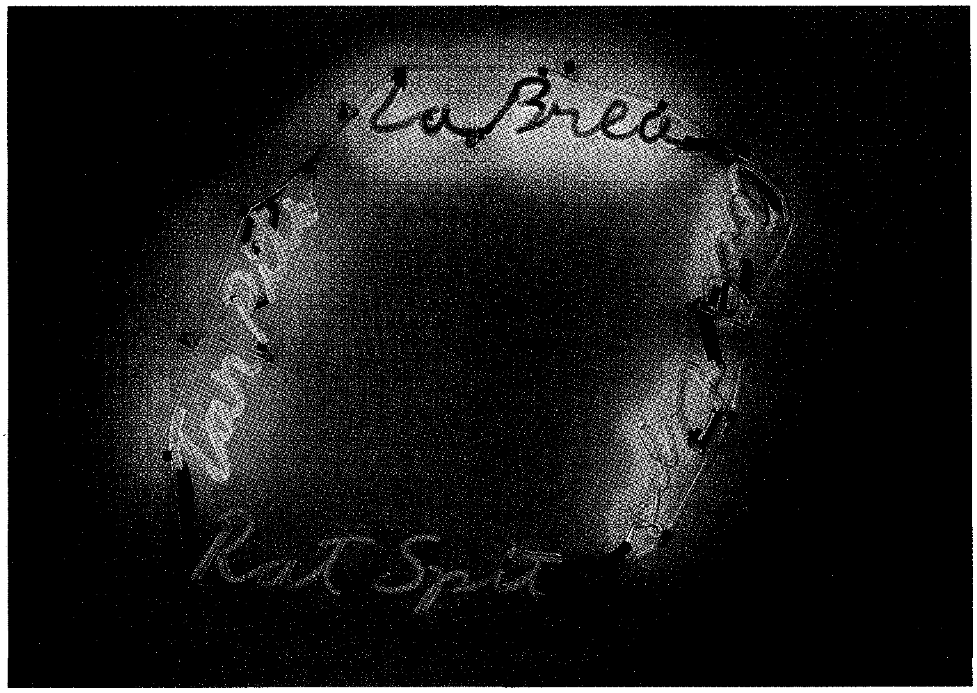
See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum and the Whitney Museum.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
No opera in the standard repertory has as much moral weight as **"Fidelio"**: composers today may want to "communicate" with their listeners, but Beethoven wanted to improve them, and this durable tale of virtue and tyranny (written soon after the American and French Revolutions) can actually leave an audience feeling that they can become better people. The company's new production, with the action successfully transferred to the present day, continues its run, with Ben Heppner, Karita Mattila, and René Pape in the leading roles; James Levine conducts. (Oct. 25 at 8 and Oct. 28 at

NEW YORK NOVEMBER 13 & 14

CONTEMPORARY ART



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1:30.) (Reviewed in this issue.) ♦ **“Carmen,”** with Olga Borodina in the title role and Roberto Alagna as Don José; Bertrand de Billy. (Oct. 26 and Oct. 31 at 8.) ♦ **“Turandot,”** with Jane Eaglen, Angelina Gheorghiu, and Richard Margison; Marco Armiliato. (Oct. 27 at 8 and Oct. 30 at 7:30.) ♦ **“La Bohème”** makes its first appearance of the season, with Cristina Gallardo-Domas, Marcello Giordani, Sondra Radvanovsky, and Jean-Luc Chaignaud in his Met début; Mr. Armiliato. (Oct. 28 at 8.) ♦ The company holds a gala benefit concert for its pension fund, featuring Cecilia Bartoli, Bryn Terfel, and the Met Orchestra and Chorus; Mr. Levine. (Oct. 29 at 5.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
Oct. 25 at 7:30: Prokofiev’s **“The Love for Three Oranges,”** a pungent neoclassical opera from 1919, with Kathleen Brett, Linda Roark-Strummer, Richard Troxell, and Matthew Chellis; conducted by George Manahan. ♦ Oct. 27 at 8 and Oct. 29 at 1:30: **“Madama Butterfly,”** with Liping Zhang, Elizabeth Batton, David Corman, and John Hancock; Brent McMunn. ♦ Oct. 28 at 1:30: **“La Traviata,”** with Virginia Grasso, Gerard Powers, and Brian Davis; Joseph Resigno. ♦ Oct. 28 at 8: **“Le Nozze di Figaro,”** with Sari Gruber, Cynthia Clayton, Paula Rasmussen, Dean Ely, and Mr. Hancock; Steuart Bedford. ♦ Oct. 31 at 7:30: David Daniels, the Joan Sutherland of countertenors, takes the title role in the company’s first-ever production of Handel’s **“Rinaldo,”** which also features Christine Goerke and Lisa Saffer; Harry Bicket. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC
As part of this year’s Next Wave Festival, Indian director Ratan Thiyam and his Chorus Repertory Theatre of Manipur (co-presented by the Asia Society) will make their New York début in Thiyam’s war play “Uttar-Priyadarsh” (“The Final Beatitude”), which will be performed in Manipuri with English surtitles. (BAM Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Oct. 25, Oct. 27, and Oct. 28 at 7:30. 718-636-4100.)

AMATO OPERA COMPANY
A twelve-performance run of “Il Trovatore” begins with an opening-night gala. (319 Bowery. 228-8200. Oct. 28 at 7.)

THE GOGMAGOGS: "GOBBLEDYGOOK"
The British group—seven young string players and theatre director Lucy Bailey—combine movement, music, and the spoken word into a “mixed theatre” format. Its five separate narratives include contributions from the jazz composer Django Bates, the playwright Caryl Churchill, and the biologist Rupert Sheldrake. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. The ten-performance run begins Oct. 31 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Oct. 26-28 at 8: Sir Colin Davis, long a favorite guest conductor at the orchestra, is well known as a gracious and pliant interpreter of Mozart; here he takes on the composer’s Bassoon Concerto, with Judith LeClair doing the solo honors. An early Schubert symphony (No. 1) and a late one of Haydn’s (No. 98) round out the program. ♦ Oct. 31 at 8: The orchestra mounts a special, one-time program in honor of its late music director Leonard Bernstein, who died ten years ago this month. Conductor Mariss Janssons replaces Kurt Masur, out for minor surgery, in Berlioz’s “Symphonie Fantastique” and Rossini’s “La Gazza Ladra” Overture; Itzhak Perlman, a violinist not particularly associated with Mr. Bernstein but one with comparable star power, brings his rich style to the maestro’s “Serenade,” for violin, strings, and percussion. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030.)

NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY
The ensemble begins its season with a program of Brahms, Dvořák, and world premières of both an old piece (Schubert’s Fantasie in F Minor, for piano four-hands, freshly orchestrated by Andy Stein, with André Watts as soloist) and a new one

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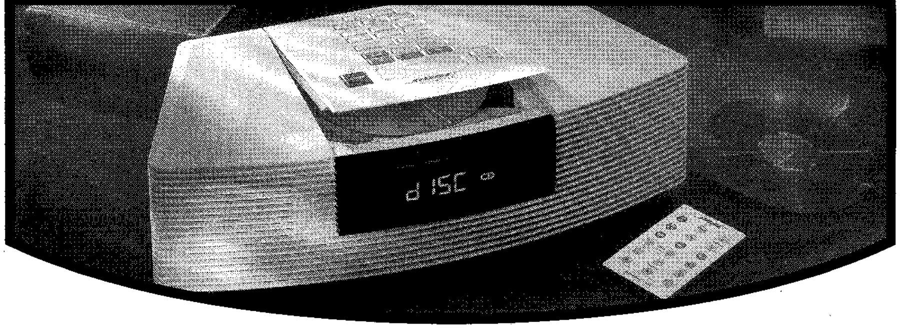

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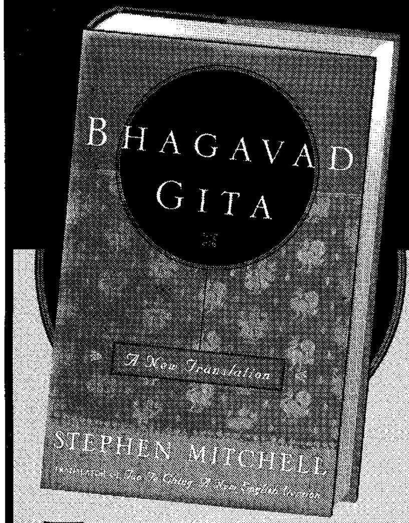

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(Daniel Brewbaker's "Fields of Vision," with mezzo-soprano Stacey Rishoi and the Young People's Chorus of New York). (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Oct. 26 at 8 and Oct. 29 at 2.)

MANHATTAN CHAMBER SINFONIA
Samuel Cristler conducts the student orchestra in symphonies by Mozart (the "Paris") and Prokofiev (the "Classical"), as well as selections by Barber, Debussy, and Charles Wuorinen. (John C. Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. Oct. 27 at 8.)

CHOIR OF ELY CATHEDRAL
The choir of men and boys sings sacred music from the English choral repertoire. (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University. Amsterdam Ave. at 117th St. Oct. 28 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA
Eiji Oue, the former Bernstein protégé who took over the Twin Cities orchestra several years ago, is winding up his turn as music director (he leaves in 2002); while not usually the most substantive of interpreters, he has let the fine-tuned ensemble he inherited from Edo de Waart sing out with a sumptuous lyricism previously denied it. Mahler's Symphony No. 1 and Webern's youthful fantasy "Im Sommerwind" should respond well to the Oue treatment; Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23, with Andreas Haefliger as soloist, will either balance the program with classical restraint or drown it in excess sugar. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Oct. 28 at 8.)

The Gogmagogs, appearing at Columbia's Miller Theatre (see Opera).

MARCELLUS HALL

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
In a program called "The Spiritual Beethoven," the orchestra (along with the New York Virtuoso Singers and vocal soloists) presents the composer's only oratorio, "Christ on the Mount of Olives," along with the lovely, underrated Mass in C. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Oct. 28 at 8.) ♦ **Note:** On the same day, the Bard Music Festival in New York also presents a Beethoven chamber-music concert in Alice Tully Hall at 2:30, as well as a symposium on the composer's work at 10 A.M. in Lincoln Center's Kaplan Penthouse.

EOS ORCHESTRA
Jonathan Sheffer, the director of Eos, scored a coup in 1995, when he persuaded the American composer-writer Paul Bowles to leave his longtime home in Tangier for a brief visit to New York, where he lived and worked in the nineteen-thirties and forties, for a concert of his music. Now, commemorating Bowles a year after his death, Sheffer joins with the 92nd Street Y to present another tribute concert, featuring the belated première of a "Romantic Suite" (1939), as well as some incidental music Bowles wrote for the original 1945 production of "The Glass Menagerie," with Cherry Jones and John Cameron Mitchell performing a scene from the play. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Oct. 29 at 2:30.) ♦ **Note:** The Y is hosting a reading of Bowles's literary work. See Above and Beyond.

JUPITER SYMPHONY
Jens Nygaard conducts Gurlitt's "Toy Symphony," as well as Mozart's Concerto for Three Pianos and Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" (with violinist Stephanie Chase). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. Oct. 30 at 2 and 7 and Oct. 31 at 8.)

RECITALS

"NEW SOUNDS LIVE" SERIES
Stephen Scott and his Bowed Piano Ensemble scored a crossover hit with the New Albion disk "Vikings of the Sunrise," in which Scott, using warm washes of minimalist sound, reimagined the Pacific Ocean journeys of both the native Polynesians and the European explorers who succeeded them. WNYC music director John Schaefer is the host. (World Financial Center Winter Garden, 200 Liberty St., between West and Vesey Sts. Oct. 25 at 6:30.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The Society's new season of "Double Exposure" concerts opens with new music by Matthew Lima, David Ludwig, and Bruce J. Taub. (Rose Studio, Lincoln Center. 875-5788. Oct. 26 at 6:45 and 8:30.) ♦ The pianist Hélène Grimaud, French by birth but Germanic by musical nature, makes her Society début, assisting colleagues in Brahms's Cello Sonata No. 1 and Schumann's Piano Quintet; Mendelssohn's String Quintet No. 2, a chamber analogue to the "Scotch" and "Italian" Symphonies, completes the program. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5788. Oct. 27 at 8 and Oct. 29 at 5.)

THE KITCHEN: "HOUSE BLEND"
The performance center's resident "big band" premières work by jazz composers Roy Nathanson and William Parker and electro-acoustic composer-improviser Zeena Parkins. (512 W. 19th St., between Tenth and Eleventh Aves. 255-5793. Oct. 26-28 at 8.)

ABSOLUTE ENSEMBLE: "SCRATCHBAND"
The young electro-acoustic group presents a way-cool program of rock and rock-influenced music by the Beatles, Miles Davis, and John Adams, among others. Violinist Lelia Josefowicz—the new bride of director Kristjan Järvi—makes a guest appearance. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Oct. 27 at 8.)

NEW YORK NEW MUSIC ENSEMBLE
In what has been described (a little hopefully, perhaps) as a "neo-romantic" program, the formidable

group presents world premières by Jonathan Dawe and Melinda Wagner, alongside works by Carter, Druckman, and Rakowski. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. 279-4200. Oct. 27 at 8.)

ANONYMOUS 4
Once again the female vocal quartet, noted for the timeless purity of its sound, tours its latest album. This time it's "1000: A Mass for the End of Time," a program of medieval chant and polyphony for the Ascension season. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. Oct. 29 at 4.)

BROOKLYN FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC
The Bouts Ensemble, an early-music group of German and American musicians, makes its U.S. début with works by Bach, Handel, and Telemann. (Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, Lafayette Ave. at South Oxford St., Brooklyn. 718-855-3053. Oct. 29 at 3.)

MELVYN TAN
In his first New York recital on the modern piano, Tan, well known for his efforts on the classical fortepiano, brings his buttery, lyrical style to sonatas of Beethoven and Mozart, and to Book II of Debussy's "Preludes." (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. Oct. 29 at 5.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
This Yale-sponsored summer festival, like the Bard Music Festival, is invading the schedules of the regular season. Two young piano trios, the American Trio Volanté and the Dutch Storioni Trio Amsterdam, perform in the festival's inaugural Debut Prize concert. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Oct. 30 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"PROUST RECAPTURED"
Lincoln Center and the PEN American Center join forces for an interdisciplinary tribute to Marcel Proust. The evening features readings from "Remembrance of Things Past" by André Aciman, Lydia Davis, William Gass, and other writers, along with the actors Zoe Caldwell and John Shea. Selections from Harold Pinter's "The Proust Screenplay," which is being produced by the National Theatre, in London, will also be read. Music by two of Proust's contemporaries, Gabriel Fauré and Reynaldo Hahn, is also on the bill. Tom Palumbo is the director. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Oct. 25 at 8.)

MORE READINGS
Oct. 25 at 7:30: By Dick Schaap, Jeff MacGregor, Bryan Burrough, Allison Glock, and others, from their contributions to "The Best American Sports Writing 2000." (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Oct. 26 at 8: The editor David Kirschenbaum, the poet Elinor Nauen, and Spike Vrusho, a columnist for the *New York Press*, read from works celebrating October's sport, baseball. (Tillie's of Brooklyn, 248 DeKalb Ave. 718-783-4101.) ♦ Oct. 30 at 8: By Ned Rorem, Joyce Carol Oates, Debra Winger, and other writers and actors, from the work of Paul Bowles (see Classical—Orchestras and Choruses). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

TALKS
Oct. 25 at 6:30: The artist Tony Oursler discusses his latest project, "The Influence Machine," which is on display in Madison Square Park. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. For reservations, which are required, call 980-4575.) ♦ Oct. 26 at 6:30: Pamela Rice, the author of "101 Reasons Why I'm a Vegetarian," reveals the tax breaks and subsidies the government gives to the meat industry. (Vegetarian Center of NYC, 150 Fifth Ave., at 20th St. 414-9100.) ♦ Oct. 26 at 7:30: The photographer Catherine Opie gives an illustrated lecture about her work. (Jurow Lecture Hall, 101 Main Building, New York University, 100 Washington Sq. E. No tickets necessary.)

TOUR
Oct. 28 at 9 A.M., 10:30 A.M., 1, and 3: Thomas Fedorek offers a pre-Halloween, candlelit exploration of the crypt beneath the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. For reservations, which are required, call 932-7347.)

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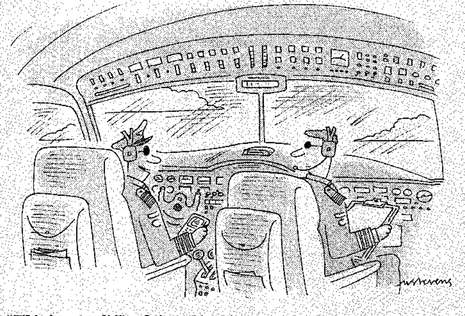

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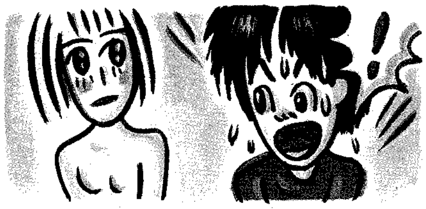
BOOK CURRENTS

Look Back on Manga



TAKESHI TADATSU

A student learns that he will collect a whopping inheritance from his great-grandfather when he graduates from college. The problem is, he can't keep his mind on his studies, or his hands off the seductive stranger who turns up in his apartment one night. This is not the plot of a saucy new network melodrama but that of **DANCE TILL TOMORROW** (Viz), a recently translated Japanese *manga* novel by Naoki Yamamoto. Yamamoto's book occupies the racier end of the *manga* spectrum, a genre of Japanese comic-strip narrative which ranges from grisly crime stories to insufferably cuddly children's cartoons.

The versatility and the overwhelming popularity of *manga*, both in Japan and abroad, has begun to prompt academic beard stroking. In the introduction to **JAPAN POP!** (M. E. Sharpe), a collection of essays about Japanese pop culture, the editor, Timothy J. Craig, quotes Frederik Schodt's claim that *manga* is a "full-fledged expressive medium, on a par with novels and films," and traces the roots of today's comics, with their fusion of narrative art and illustrated humor, to the erotic adventure novels of the Edo period. In the nineteen-twenties, *manga* became an outlet for the expression of working-class discontent; by the nineteen-nineties, as Sharon Kinsella writes in **ADULT MANGA** (University of Hawaii), the genre was largely subsumed by major publishing houses. Still, underground *manga* survives. Sujata Massey's novel **THE FLOATING GIRL** (HarperCollins) centers on a group of fans who design and distribute a homespun version of the *manga* series "Mars Girl." These devotees walk the streets dressed like the eponymous heroine and display an enthusiasm that verges on worship. As one aficionado remarks, "She's thrown down ten flights of stairs and she jumps up, ready to fight. Wouldn't we all like to do that?"

—*William Cohen*

Books.

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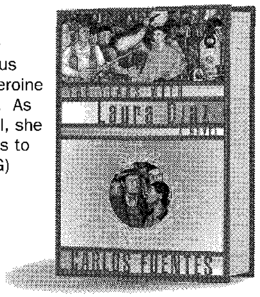

Painting a vivid portrait of Mexico in the twentieth century, Carlos Fuentes gives us the life story of Laura Díaz, an alluring heroine who becomes a politically charged artist. As wife, mother, lover, and independent soul, she triumphs, despite her many tragic losses to Mexico's turbulent, corrupt politics. (FSG)

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SOMETIMES I DREAM IN ITALIAN

by Rita Ciresi

This bittersweet tale is centered around two Italian sisters looking back on their childhood. One prepares to get married while the other is on the verge of divorce, as they struggle with the past, present and future. (Delacorte Press)

Rita Ciresi
Sometimes I Dream in Italian

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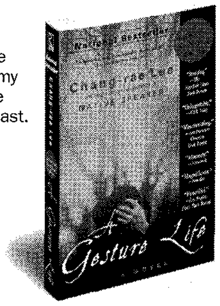
A GESTURE LIFE

by Chang-rae Lee

The *Discover Great New Writers* Award-winning author delivers a poignant novel about a native-born Korean adapting first to Japanese culture as a medical officer in the Imperial Army in 1944, and later to postwar New York as he attempts to start a new life and escape his past. (Riverhead)



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THE BRIDEGROOM

by Ha Jin

This mesmerizing collection of witty short stories explores the daily lives of contemporary Chinese men and women who feel the influence of the West while still immersed in a society that tries to control their thoughts and actions. (Pantheon)

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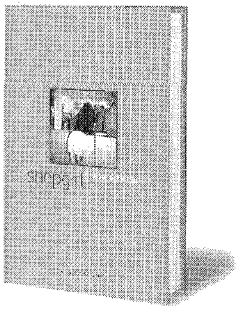
SHOPGIRL

by Steve Martin

From actor/comedian Steve Martin comes the story of beautiful Mirabelle, who supports herself by selling gloves at Neiman Marcus in Beverly Hills. After she meets wealthy, lonely businessman Ray Porter, the two navigate amusing and heartbreaking consequences as they inch their way towards love. (Hyperion)



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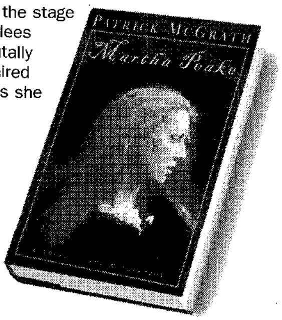
MARTHA PEAKE

by Patrick McGrath

The burgeoning American Revolution sets the stage for this haunting tale of a young girl who flees London for Massachusetts after being brutally raped by her drunken father. The flame-haired heroine fights her way through adversity as she finds herself increasingly drawn into the Revolution. (Random House)



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MOVIES OPENING

BLAIR WITCH 2: BOOK OF SHADOWS
Joe Berlinger, a documentary filmmaker, directed this sequel to "The Blair Witch Project," in which a group of students fascinated by the movie visit Burkittsville. Opening Oct. 27.

THE BRIDGE
Gérard Depardieu directs and plays a lead role in this romantic drama set in Normandy. With Carole Bouquet and Charles Berling. In French. Opening Oct. 27. (Paris.)

COLLECTORS
A documentary directed by Julian P. Hobbs, about two men who collect the art of serial killers. Opening Oct. 27. (Cinema Village.)

GEORGE WASHINGTON
David Gordon Green wrote and directed this drama about a group of black children who encounter a tragedy in their rural Southern town. Opening Oct. 27.

THE LITTLE VAMPIRE
Angela Sommer-Bodenburg's novel about a boy who befriends a vampire is adapted for the big screen by Ulrich Edel. Opening Oct. 27.

LUCKY NUMBERS
A TV weatherman (John Travolta) attempts to defraud the state lottery, in this drama directed by Nora Ephron. With Lisa Kudrow, Tim Roth, and Michael Moore. Opening Oct. 27.

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS
Tim Burton's stop-motion-animation fable, originally released in 1993, returns to theatres. Opening Oct. 27.

A ROOM FOR ROMEO BRASS
The story of two boys who are outcasts in their Midlands housing estate, written and directed by Shane Meadows. Opening Oct. 27.

SOUND AND FURY
A documentary about the effect of cochlear implants, a medical technology affecting the deaf community. Directed by Josh Aronson. Opening Oct. 25. (Film Forum.)

STARDOM
Denys Arcand directed this mock documentary about a young girl (Jessica Paré) who becomes an international supermodel. With Dan Aykroyd and Frank Langella. Opening Oct. 27.

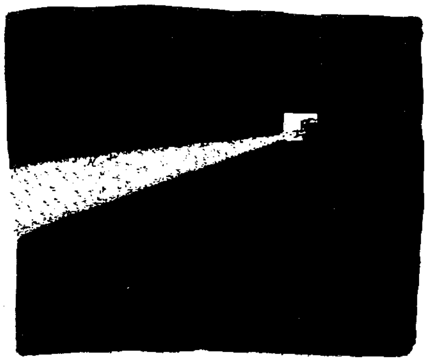
A TIME FOR DRUNKEN HORSES
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening Oct. 27.

VENUS BEAUTY INSTITUTE
Nathalie Baye, Audrey Tautou, and Mathilde Seigner play three friends who work together at a beauty salon in this comedy directed by Tonie Marshall. In French. Opening Oct. 27.

FILM NOTES

ALMOST FAMOUS
Cameron Crowe's genial but remarkably undramatic account of his life and not very hard times as a fifteen-year-old rock critic in the early nineteen-seventies. Crowe's stand-in, William Miller (Patrick Fugit), leaves home against the wishes of his college-professor mom (Frances McDormand) when he accepts an assignment from *Rolling Stone* to cover a mid-level band called Stillwater. On the road, he falls into an intense admiration of the good-looking lead guitarist (Billy Crudup) and receives gentle treatment from a trio of groupies, the Band-Aids (led by Kate Hudson). Much of the movie plays easily and well as a record of good times, but there's no particular point to it.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/18/00.) (Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

BAMBOOZLED
In his latest picture, Spike Lee delivers some shattering news: TV is bad for us and for race relations. Marlon Wayans plays Pierre Delacroix—a TV writer who is hired by a network to come up with a fresh idea, and duly delivers a minstrel show, complete with chicken gags and black actors encrusted in blackface. The ratings hit the roof, but Pierre and his colleague (Jada Pinkett-Smith), as well as the energetic stars of the act (Savion Glover and Tommy Davidson), come to feel besmirched by their success, as if they were betraying the black cause. (You can't help thinking that one of them might have noticed that to begin with.) Having started with satirical high jinks, the movie ends in desperate spasms of subplot, and you keep tripping over the big bump in Lee's conceit: the minstrel show itself is stupendously unamusing.—*Anthony Lane* (10/9/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)



BEST IN SHOW
Christopher Guest reunites much of the cast of "Waiting for Guffman" for another mock documentary; the target this time around is the cloistered world of championship-dog breeding. Guest directs and scripts with a loose, improvisational style (no dialogue was written down), and while some of the scenes glide along with a quick-witted tempo, others are awkward. The dogs themselves are splendid, and when the satire works the laughs are plentiful. Best-in-group awards go to Parker Posey and Michael Hitchcock as an uptight suburban couple whose courtship involved adjacent Starbucks franchises, John Michael Higgins as a preening owner who outshines his shih tzu, and Fred Willard as a chipper commentator who showers asinine comments on the proceedings. If Guest has a trademark style, it's the airtight earnestness he demands of his cast—there's not one wink in the entire film.—*Michael Agger* (Angelika Film Center, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, and Orpheum VII.)

BILLY ELLIOT
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

CLOSELY WATCHED TRAINS
A wryly tender Czech film about how a shy, scared young man, who comes from a long line of patsies and fools, succeeds in bed but loses his life. This first film, directed by Jirí Menzel in 1966, is based on the well-known ironic novel by Bohumil Hrabal, who collaborated with Menzel on the scenario. It's set during the Second World War, and most of it takes place at a village railway station; it's fairly simple—the modest sort of film that shows human concern and decency but isn't very stimulating, and that sometimes takes the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film (as this one did). But it's also a sophisticated, elliptical folk tale, with quirky moments of small-town passion, and a funny sequence in which an assistant stationmaster rubber-stamps a girl telegrapher's buttocks. In Czech.—*Pauline Kael* (Museum of Modern Art; Oct. 27.)

THE CONTENDER
Vigorously unsubtle political entertainment. The Democratic President, Jackson Evans (Jeff Bridges), a wily, dominating fellow who may not be good at heart, nominates a woman, Senator Laine Hanson (Joan Allen), to be his Vice-President after the sitting Vice-President dies. A Republican congressman, Shelly Runyon (Gary Oldman), wants to block her. His weapon: some photographs of her participation, as a college freshman, in a frat-house orgy. When the senator stands on her dignity, refusing to answer Runyon's questions, the movie becomes an attack on double standards—a noble conception but also a needlessly solemn one. The picture is juicily well acted, however, particularly by Oldman, whose congressman is physically mediocre in every way yet possesses a dour firepower that never lets up. Written and directed by Rod Lurie, who uses Washington unimaginatively, like a TV-movie director, but gets the best out of his cast. With Christian Slater as an ambitious young congressman and Sam Elliott as a Presidential adviser.—*D.D.* (10/16 & 10/23/00) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Union Square, Waverly 1 and 2, and Ziegfeld.)

DANCER IN THE DARK
The new Lars Von Trier film makes his previous efforts seem like models of orthodoxy and restraint. Shot in Sweden, it's set in an America of Von Trier's own devising. Most of the characters speak with foreign accents, and the heroine—a timid, bespectacled factory worker and single mother named Selma—is played by Björk, the Icelandic pop munchkin. Selma has a congenital eye disease, and she is saving up to pay for an operation for her young son, who will otherwise follow her into blindness. The film is unashamedly two-toned, split between a granular authenticity and a stylized gaudiness. The musical scenes—in the factory, on a railroad track—have a deliberate, stamping awkwardness, overlaid with Björk's animal wailing. Many viewers have refused to stomach this unhealthy mixture, yet it feels laced with surprising power, and the harshness of the dénouement is unfeigned.—*A.L.* (9/25/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, State, and Union Square.)

DR. T & THE WOMEN
Dressed to the nines in billowing capes, fur chokers, and huge, drooping hats, the upper-crust women of Dallas rush about the city, drinks in hand, and when they have nothing else to do, which is most of the time, they storm the office of their gynecologist, Dr. T (Richard Gere), a handsome and masterly practitioner who treats them like goddesses. At first, Robert Altman's movie seems to be an amiable, whirligig farce—and a borderline dirty joke—about a man who sugars women, and the women who love him in return, but it develops an odd apocalyptic tone. There are recurring rainstorms, including a real humdinger at the end, which is supposed to cleanse the fallen city of Dallas. Altman works with his usual fluid camera and his overlapped chattering voices, but there's a sourness bordering on condescension which destroys the pleasures of his skill.—*D.D.* (10/16 & 10/23/00) (Angelika Film Center, Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Cinema I, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Park & 86th Street Cinemas.)

THE EXORCIST
The demonic possession of a child, treated with shallow seriousness. The picture is designed to scare people, and it does so by mechanical means: levitations, swivelling heads, vomit being spewed in people's faces. A viewer can become glumly anesthetized by the brackish color and the senseless ugliness of the conception. Neither the producer-writer, William Peter Blatty, nor the director, William Friedkin, shows any feeling for the little girl's helplessness and suffering, or for her mother's. It would be sheer insanity to take children. The film was originally released in 1973; the version now playing has additional footage and a remastered soundtrack.—*P.K.* (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

GIRLFIGHT
Diana Guzman (Michelle Rodriguez), a sullen, withdrawn Brooklyn girl who lives with a hapless, preening father (Paul Calderon) and an unformed younger brother (Ray Santiago), walks into a local gym where her brother boxes and at once feels at home. The trainers treat her with rough impersonality, which is exactly what she wants, and she struggles to channel her anger into the skills of a boxer. This small independent movie, written and

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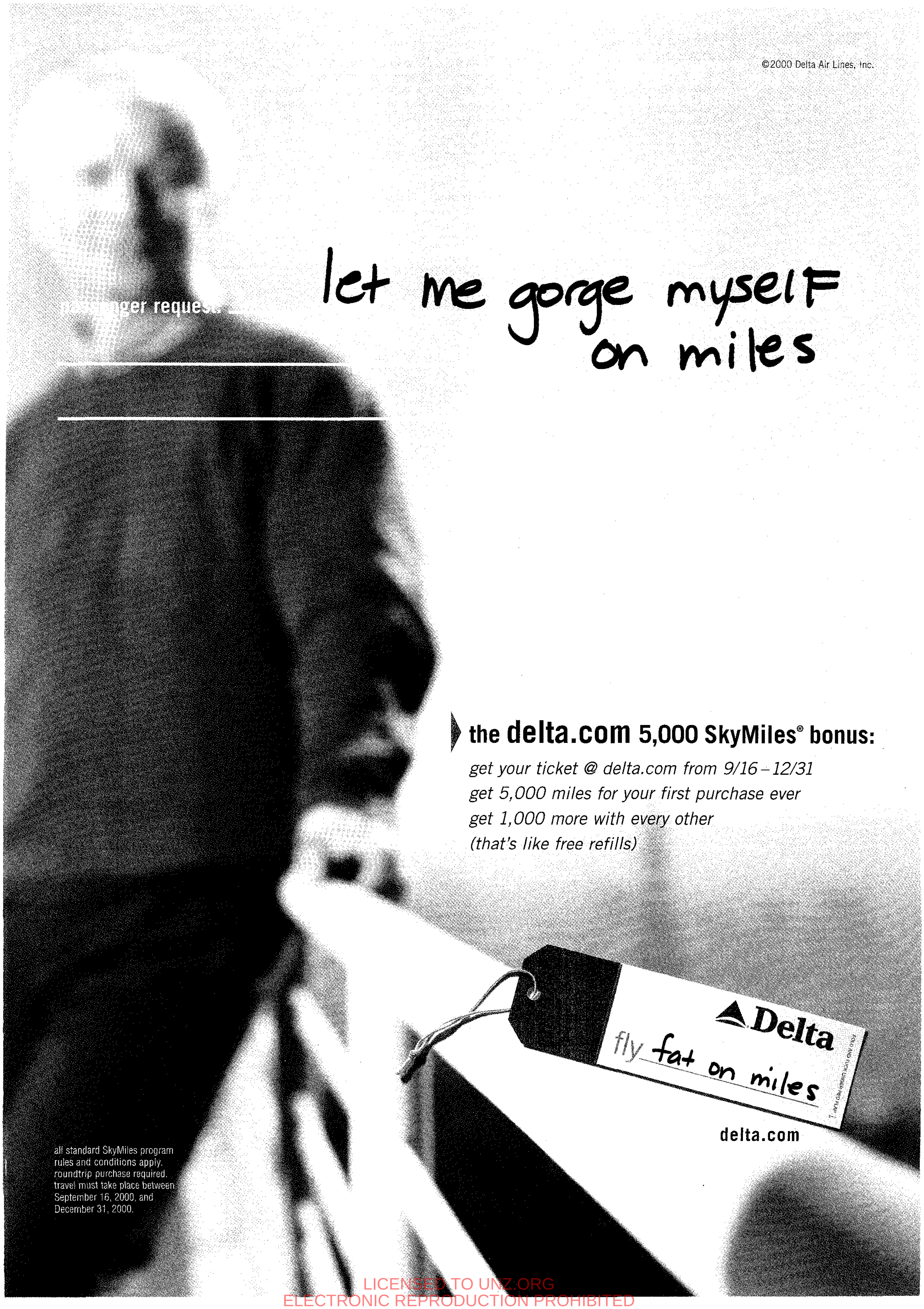
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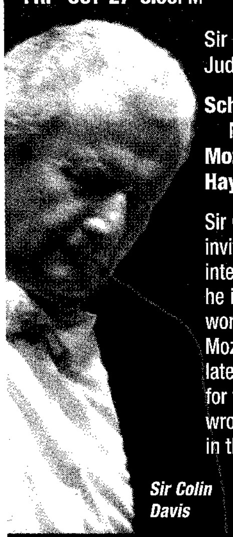

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Mozart: Bassoon Concerto
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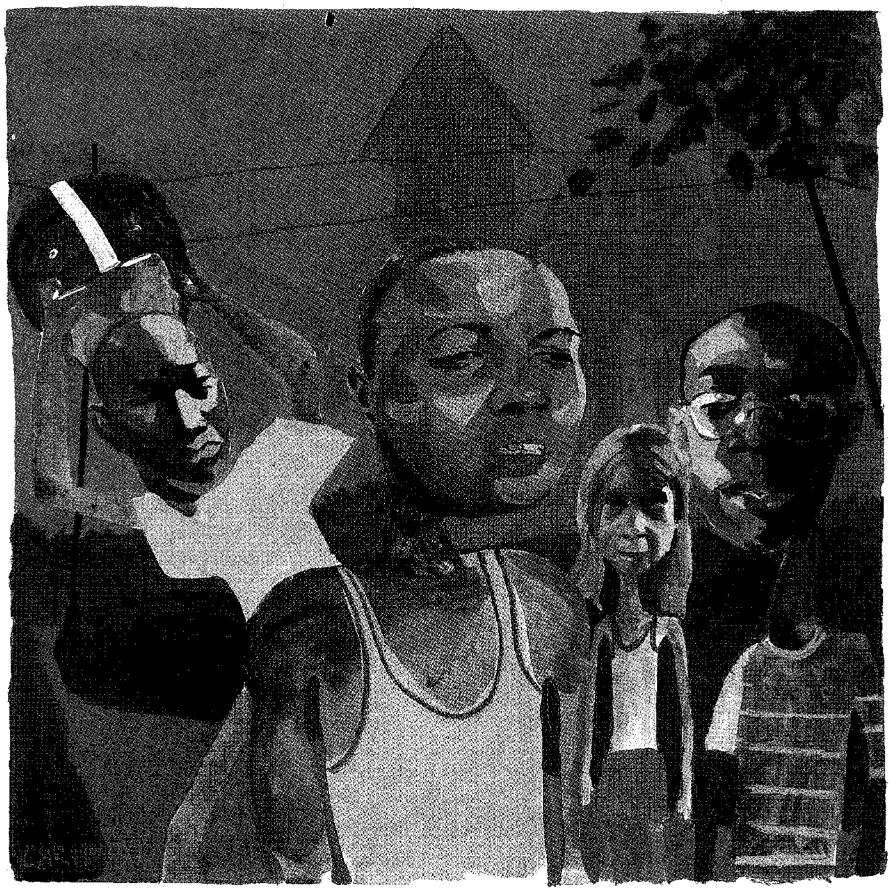
directed by Karyn Kusama, is an attempt at roughhouse feminist populism. At the end, it turns into a fairy tale as Diana falls for a beautiful young male boxer (Santiago Douglas) who adores her and her right hook, too. The movie may be naïve and underdone, but it has a new, live subject and, in Rodriguez, a powerhouse star who could go a long way.—*D.D.* (10/2/00) (Battery Park 16 and Union Square.)



Opening October 27, "George Washington," directed by David Gordon Green.

GREGORY CHRISTIE

THE INNOCENTS

Directed by Jack Clayton and photographed by Freddie Francis, this 1961 version of Henry James's "Turn of the Screw" is one of the most elegantly beautiful ghost movies ever made. It features a scary, intense performance by Deborah Kerr, as the governess who sees demonic spectres and forces one of her two charges—the little boy Miles (Martin Stephens)—to confront them. Both Kerr and Michael Redgrave, as the gentleman who hires her, have just the right note of suppressed hysteria in their voices. The settings—the house, the park, the lake—are magnificent, and the script, by William Archibald, Truman Capote, and John Mortimer, offers the pleasures of literacy. The filmmakers concentrate on the virtuoso possibilities in the material, and the beauty of the images raises our terror to a higher plane than the simple fears of most ghost stories. There are great sequences (like the one in a schoolroom) that work on the viewer's imagination and remain teasingly ambiguous.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Oct. 31.)

I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE

The producer Val Lewton specialized in economical and literate horror movies. But on its own small scale, this tensile mood piece from 1943—about love, revenge, and voodoo—is extravagantly lyrical. A riff on Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" which prefigures Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea," it stars Frances Dee as a Canadian nurse who takes a job tending the ambulatory yet mentally dead wife (Christine Gordon) of a West Indian plantation owner (Tom Conway). Lewton's screenwriters, Curt Siodmak and Ardel Wray, knew how to make the occult and psychological converge, and the director, Jacques Tourneur, a master at orchestrating shadowy and suggestive forms, gave supernatural doings the force of poetic justice.—*Michael Sragow* (Anthology Film Archives; Oct. 27-29.)

THE LADIES MAN

A movie that divides the world into those who think Afros are funny and those who do not. The "Saturday Night Live" comic Tim Meadows, as the lisping, lubricious radio host Leon Phelps, ambles through Chicago in leisure suits, dispensing his funkified prescriptions for love. The sophomoric humor serves up cheap laughs as the movie—the latest in Lorne Michaels's skit-to-silver-screen transplants—lolls around in shallow stereotypes.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

The English "angry young man" bursts onto the screen and delivers some of the most electrifying dialogue of the era. Jimmy Porter (Richard Burton) is a blazingly articulate hero with passion and power, and no place in life, or cause or goal. He is an artist with no art to practice. As rancorous as Hamlet, he rages at his pale, zombie-like wife (Mary Ure), at his foxy mistress (Claire Bloom), at his good friend (Gary Raymond), and at all the dismal English life around him. Directed by Tony Richardson, from Nigel Kneale's adaptation of the landmark play by John Osborne, it's something of a mess, but this mess—and "The Entertainer," also a mess—are possibly the most exciting films to have come out of England in this period.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Oct. 27-28.)

MEET THE PARENTS

Jay Roach moves on from the campy delights of the "Austin Powers" series to direct this smoothly acted comedy of errors. Ben Stiller plays a modern man charged with a Victorian task: asking his girlfriend's father for permission to marry his daughter.

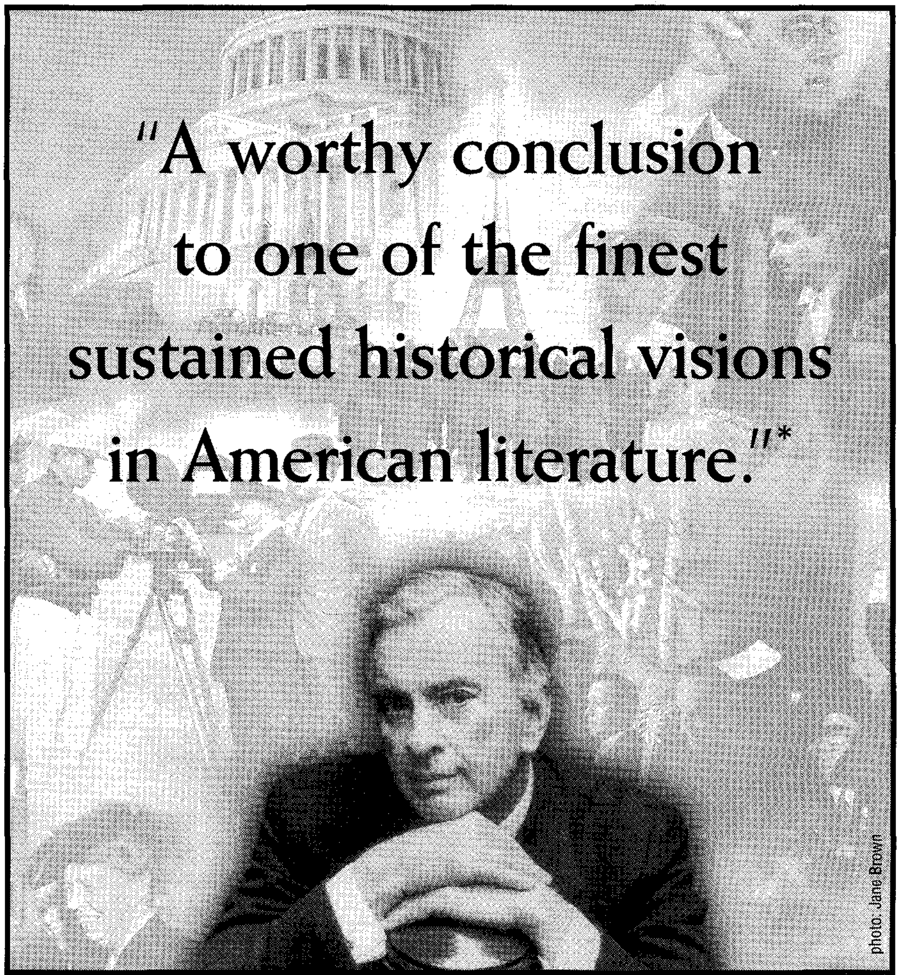
With a calamitous surname ("pronounced just like it's spelled, F-O-C-K-E-R") and a faintly hilarious profession (male nurse), Stiller seems like a sitting duck for the secretive, overprotective father, played by Robert De Niro. Stiller grovels, De Niro growls, and the girls (Blythe Danner and Teri Polo) watch from the sidelines. This is dumbed-up comedy: there are just enough unexpected moments to redeem all the easy pleasures of the slapstick.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

NURSE BETTY
A calm, sunny comedy from Neil LaBute, who is taking a break from the nastiness of previous work like "In the Company of Men." That was cinema as vivisection; this has its spasms of violence, but its target—disappointingly soft—is the delusion of ordinary folk. Betty (Renée Zellweger) is a wife and waitress who sees her husband (Aaron Eckhart) murdered in their Kansas home. In blithe mental confusion, she sets off for Los Angeles, pursued by the killers (Morgan Freeman and Chris Rock), to find a fictitious doctor—the supergroomed hero of a television soap. He is merely an actor (Greg Kinnear) who can't decide how to handle the unwavering force of her credulity. Zellweger strolls and simpers through the story, while Freeman falls in love with her from afar. LaBute wants to inspect their uncomprehending obsessions, but the film feels too flimsy to bear much satirical weight.—*A.L.* (9/11/00) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, and Murray Hill Cinemas.)

RATCATCHER
There are no cheap epiphanies in this interior, melancholy portrait of a boy growing up in a Glasgow housing project. The director Lynne Ramsay discovered William Eadie, an untrained actor, and she evokes a complete emotional consciousness from his open, enigmatic face. Her camera hews so closely to his world view that you become fully immersed in his sadness. The inexplicable tragedy that opens the film remains just that, and this lack of closure resonates long after the end credits.—*M.A.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinemas.)

REQUIEM FOR A DREAM
Darren Aronofsky's new film stars Ellen Burstyn as Sara Goldfarb, a Brighton Beach widow who launches herself on a crash diet—a path that will lead to pill addiction and electroshock therapy. Meanwhile, her son Harry (Jared Leto) and his girlfriend, Marion (Jennifer Connelly), yield to the pull of hard drugs. No one in this picture seems to have any powers of resistance; who would have thought denizens of Brighton Beach would give up without a fight? Each of the characters is fenced in by solitude; Aronofsky divides them by split-screen, and punches home their addiction with a blistering montage of pills, puffs, and widening eyes. All of this is managed with formidable skill, but it shuts the movie down, and the various junkies—even Burstyn, who gives the role everything she's got—end up looking less substantial than their respective poisons. A cautionary tale, maybe, but it gets a dangerous buzz from the aesthetics of a fix. The script was adapted from the novel by Hubert Selby, Jr., who appears as a ferrety prison guard.—*A.L.* (10/9/00) (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

SOLAS
Pregnant and alone, a beautiful young woman named Maria (Ana Fernandez) has hidden herself in the ragged outskirts of a nameless Spanish city. Into this scene of urban isolation arrives Maria's mother, played by Maria Galina, and from the start she fills the screen with a radiant beneficence. Her village-bound, old-fashioned ways build a sense of community where there was none, and her unwavering devotion softens her daughter's jaundiced outlook. With each minute, the film lifts in spirit, and though it plays a familiar, sentimental melody it's still capable of generating some genuine pathos. When the director, Benito Zambrano, dedicates the film to his mother in the end credits, the effect of having watched a Hallmark card is complete. In Spanish.—*M.A.* (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)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A TIME FOR DRUNKEN HORSES
The Northern Iran winters are so cold that the Kurdish smugglers who live there feed their mules alcohol so that they will carry loads over the mountain passes. In this world of high-risk border crossings and death by land mine, a fatherless young boy named Ayoub scrapes out a living doing odd tasks, supporting his sisters and crippled brother. This may seem like a recipe for seventy-seven minutes of misery, but the director Bahman Ghobadi's affection for his subjects gives the film a certain lightness. He takes the raw materials of his homeland—the harsh landscape, communal rooms, and lambent-eyed children—and fashions a visual poem. Ghobadi documents his subjects without intruding, and the results are quietly enthralling. In Kurdish.—*M.A.* (State.)

THE YARDS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, and Lincoln Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

ANIMAL FACTORY
Cinema Village.

BEDAZZLED
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.

THE BROKEN HEARTS CLUB
BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, and Quad Cinema.

HUMAN RESOURCES
Pioneer.

THE LEGEND OF DRUNKEN MASTER
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Sixplex, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Village East.

LIVE NUDE GIRLS UNITE!
Quad Cinema.

LOST SOULS
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.

PAY IT FORWARD
Coronet Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, and Orpheum VII.

REMEMBER THE TITANS
Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas.

SING-ALONG SOUND OF MUSIC
Waverly 1 and 2.

TABOO
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

TIGERLAND
Empire 25, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.

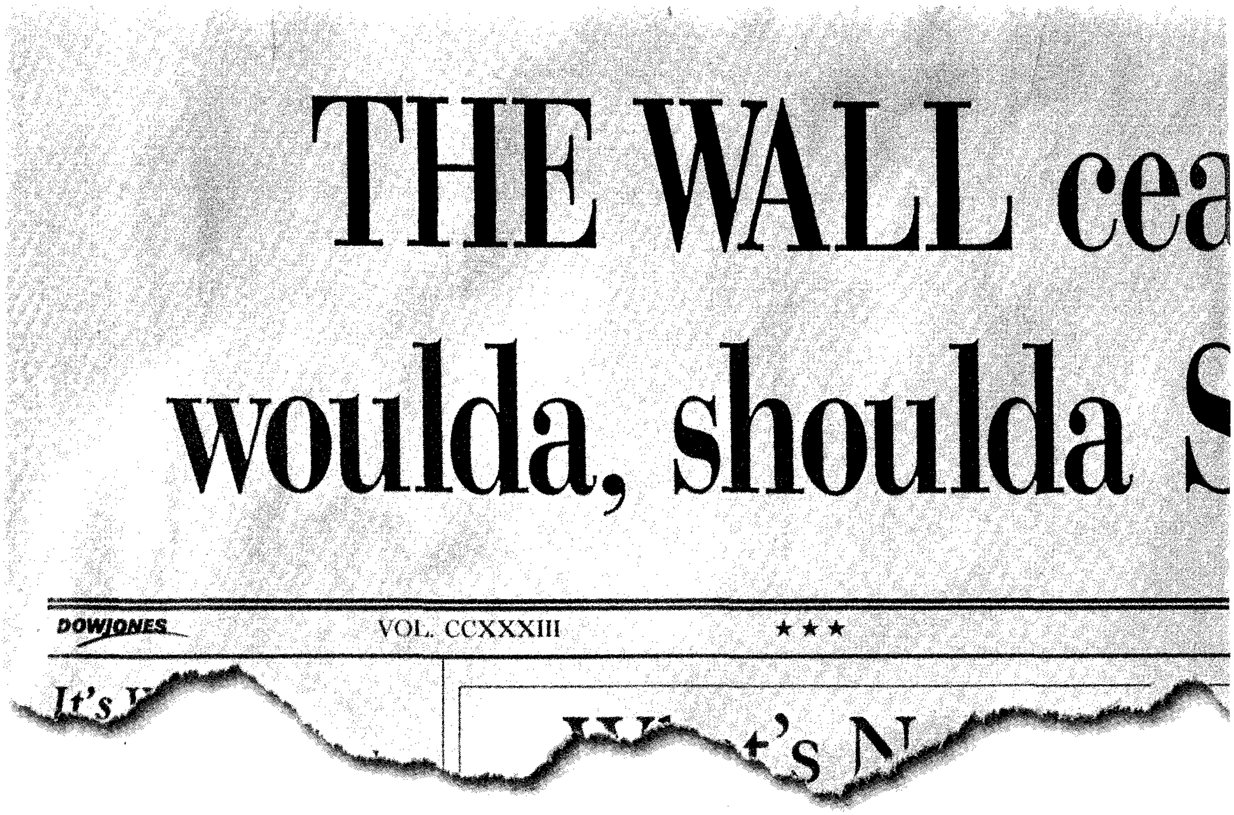
TWO FAMILY HOUSE
72nd Street East and Union Square.

YI YI (A ONE AND A TWO)
Film Forum.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.



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Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave.
at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Oct. 29: "Lon Chaney: Man of a Thousand Faces." Oct. 28 at 3: "Tell It to the Marines" (1927, George Hill). ♦ Oct. 28 at 5: "While the City Sleeps" (1928, Jack Conway). ♦ Oct. 29 at 2: "West of Zanzibar" (1928, Tod Browning). ♦ Oct. 29 at 4: "The Unholy Three" (1930, Conway). ♦ Classic movies. Oct. 28-29: "Black Sunday" (1960, Mario Bava; in Italian).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Through Nov. 8: A Pier Paolo Pasolini retrospective. All films are in Italian with English subtitles. Oct. 26 at 7: "The Scrounger" (1961). ♦ Oct. 27 at 9:30: Four short comic fables, including "La Ricotta" (1962-63), with Orson Welles. ♦ Oct. 28 at 5: "Rage" (1963) and "The Walls of Sana'a" (1970-71). ♦ Oct. 28 at 6:30: "The Gospel According to Matthew" (1964). ♦ Oct. 29 at 6: "Love Meetings" (1963-64). ♦ Oct. 29 at 8: "Hawks and Sparrows" (1966). ♦ Oct. 30 at 6: "Oedipus Rex" (1967). ♦ Oct. 30 at 10: "Medea" (1969-70). ♦ Classic horror films for Halloween. Oct. 27 at 7, Oct. 28 at 6 and 9:45, and Oct. 29 at 7: "Eyes Without a Face" (1959, Georges Franju; in French). ♦ Oct. 27 at 9, Oct. 28 at 8, and Oct. 29 at 5:15: "I Walked with a Zombie" (†). ♦ Oct. 27 at 10:30, Oct. 28 at 11:30, and Oct. 29 at 9: "Cat People" (1942, Jacques Tourneur).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Oct. 25 at 7:30: "The Unholy Three" (1925, Tod Browning). ♦ Oct. 26 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Claire Dolan" (1998, Lodge Kerrigan). ♦ Four films from the Indian writer-and-director team of M. K. Binodini Devi and Aribam Syam Sharma. All films are in Manipuri with English subtitles. Oct. 27 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "My Son, My Precious" (1981). ♦ Oct. 28 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The New Self" (1990). ♦ Oct. 29 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Orchids of Manipur" (1994) and "Sangai: Dancing Deer of Manipur" (1988). ♦ Oct. 30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:40: "Shakespeare Wallah" (1965, James Ivory). ♦ Oct. 31 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "A Chinese Ghost Story" (1987, Siu-Tung Ching; in Cantonese).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Nov. 30: "The British New Wave: From Angry Young Men to Swinging London." Oct. 27-28 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:40: "Room at the Top" (1959, Jack Clayton). ♦ Oct. 27-28 at 3:40 and 7:45: "Look Back in Anger" (†). ♦ Oct. 29-30 at 1, 4:45, and 8:40: "The Entertainer" (1960, Tony Richardson). ♦ Oct. 29-30 at 2:50, 6:40, and 10:30: "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner" (1962, Richardson). ♦ Oct. 31 at 2:50, 6:35, and 10:20: "Night Must Fall" (1964, Karel Reisz). ♦ Oct. 31 at 1, 4:45, and 8:30: "The Innocents" (†).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Dec. 12: "The Lost Childhood," films about youth and adolescence. Oct. 26 at 6: "You're a Big Boy Now" (1966, Francis Ford Coppola). ♦ Oct. 27 at 2: "Time Stands Still" (1982, Péter Gothár; in Hungarian). ♦ Oct. 27 at 6: "Closely Watched Trains" (†). ♦ Oct. 27 at 8: "The Sound of Trumpets" (1961, Ermanno Olmi; in Italian). ♦ Oct. 27 at 8: Three films by James Herbert (1977-1992). ♦ Oct. 28 at 2: "Two Daughters" (1961, Satyajit Ray; in Bengali). ♦ Oct. 28 at 5: "Pather Panchali" (1955, Ray; in Bengali). ♦ Oct. 29 at 1: "Fanny and Alexander" (1983, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Oct. 29 at 3: "The Abandoned Children" (1974, Danny Lyon; in Spanish). ♦ Oct. 29 at 5: "A Perfect World" (1993, Clint Eastwood). ♦ Oct. 31 at 6: "The Shining" (1980, Stanley Kubrick).

THE NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF RUSSIAN FILMS
Ziegfeld and 59th Street East Cinema (619-3033)—Oct. 22-29: Recent cinema from Russia, as well as an Alexander Sokurov retrospective. The festival opens with the première of "Captain's Daughter," (2000, Alexander Proshkin), an adaptation of Pushkin's novella, and closes with "His Wife's Diary" (2000, Alexander Uchitel), a bio-pic of the novelist Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin. For a complete schedule, visit http://www.nfrfilm.com.

THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Classic Hong Kong action films. Oct. 27-28 at midnight: "The Valiant Ones" (1975, King Hu; in Cantonese).

SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Through Nov. 28: "Empires of Passion: The Cinema of Obsession." Oct. 31 at 7: "Bitter Moon" (1992, Roman Polanski). ♦ Oct. 31 at 9:30: "Peeping Tom" (1960, Michael Powell).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Oct. 31: "Totally Totò," a retrospective of the Italian screen comedian. All films are in Italian with English subtitles. Oct. 25 at 3 and 7: "The Passionate Thief" (1960, Mario Monicelli). ♦ Oct. 26 at 1 and 5 and Oct. 28 at 4: "Totò Diabolicus" (1962, Steno). ♦ Oct. 27 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:30 and Oct. 28 at 6: "The Two Colonels" (1963, Steno). ♦ Oct. 26 at 3 and Oct. 27 at 3:30 and 7:30: "Totò and Peppino Divided in Berlin" (1962, Giorgio Bianchi). ♦ Oct. 27 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:30 and Oct. 28 at 6: "The Two Colonels" (1963, Steno). ♦ Oct. 28 at 8, Oct. 29 at 6:30, and Oct. 30 at 1: "Totò Versus the 4" (1963, Steno). ♦ Oct. 28 at 10, Oct. 29 at 4 and 8:30, and Oct. 30 at 3: "Hawks and Sparrows" (1966, Pier Paolo Pasolini).

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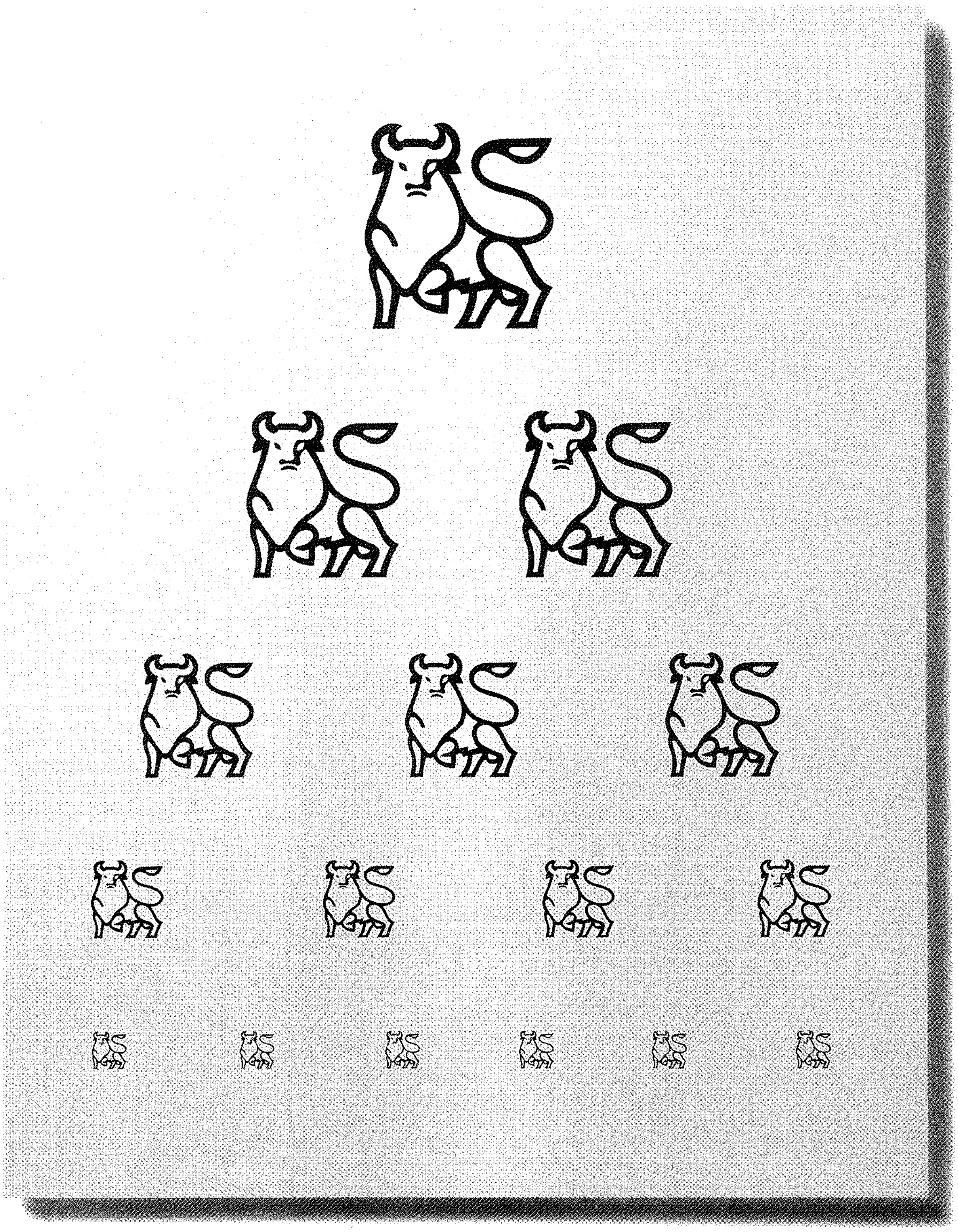

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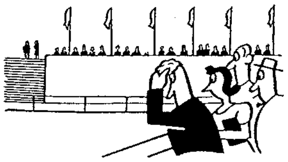
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

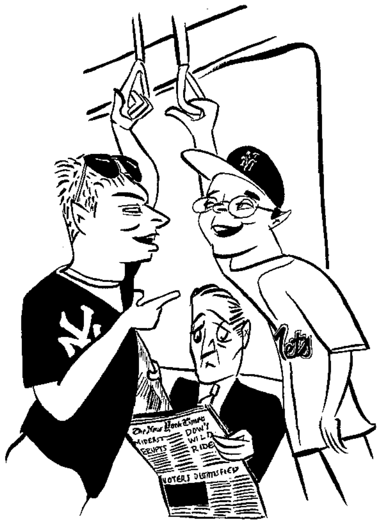
COMMENT
GOOD DAYS, BAD DAYS



The city this week feels small and marvellous and unreal. Small and marvellous because with the Subway Series, the furious shuttling between the Stadium and Shea, the wallowing in exquisite nightly drama and unapologetic self-regard, New Yorkers seem for the moment to need nothing, and no one else, in the world. It's a cinematic feeling to walk up the street and follow the game as the play-by-play wafts out a cab window, then from the doorway of a bar, following you all the way home, as if the city, for once, were a communal, and not a lonely, arrangement. If they're watching out in Yuma and down in Corpus Christi, well, that's great, but this is an intensely local thing, a transporting weeklong obsession that cannot end badly—and how rare and precious is that? In a few days' time we will have gorged on ball talk, on bogus memories of Ebbets Field and spaldeens, but please don't bother us with irony yet. Right now the indulgence is sweet.

What's unreal about it all is the timing, for the Subway Series has begun just as public life seems to be entering a new stage of gritty realism. What we have known all along would happen—that the era of lavender-scented euphoria would come to an end sooner or later—is now, quite possibly, at hand. Dow Jones briefly lowered his haughty brow below the ten-thousand level, auguring what's politely called a "softening" in the economy. The Presidential debates, to say nothing of the ludicrous theatre criticism that attends them, have revealed the most maddening of choices for the most important office on the globe: an incurious governor who disdains the federal government he hopes so desperately to lead or a substantial Vice-President who seems incapable of a consistent, mature voice from one week to the next. Considering the still healthy state of the nation, Al Gore has as good a claim as anyone for election (or call it reëlection) to the White House in a generation, but he cannot seem to make his case.

Worst of all, the prospects for a Middle East peace settlement, for a lasting coexistence between Israel and the Palestinians, have possibly been dashed for years to come. A rich and stable nation can endure a "softening," and even a vaporous President. (Not forever, perhaps, but for a while. It has happened before, and not so long ago.) But the stakes in the Middle East are something else. The violence on the West Bank and in Gaza these past few weeks has burned down the jury-rigged framework of trust in the region and is likely to reorder for the worse the politics of both the Israelis and the Palestinians.



The ideological spectrum in Israel is shifting to the right so quickly that its Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, may soon find himself the most left-wing citizen in the land, a circumstance that will lead either to the reluctant inclusion of enemies in his cabinet or to the rapid return of Benjamin Netanyahu. Many of the most ardent champions of the Oslo accords, from Leah Rabin to Amos Oz, have retreated to the darkest corners of self-reproach and doubt; the right feels triumphant and justified and indulges in slogans that include "Rabbi Kahane was right"; and Beltway warriors like George Will have the gall to lambaste Barak, once the most celebrated of military officers, for his "weakness."

Among the Palestinians, violence remains the tactic of maximal gain. At Camp David, Barak offered Arafat and the Palestinians nearly all of the West Bank and an unprecedented plan for autonomy in part of East Jerusalem. Arafat sought refuge instead in the politics

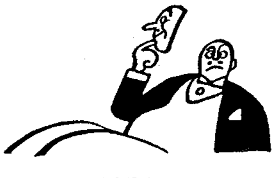
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

of martyrdom and revolt—and, in this, he found a willing Israeli dance partner. Ariel Sharon, whose résumé is so rich with betrayal and self-aggrandizement that Golda Meir once called him "a danger to democracy" and Menachem Begin cracked that he was capable of surrounding the Knesset with tanks, knew precisely how to use Arafat's refusal to advantage. His visit to the Al Aksa Mosque compound (a visit foolishly sanctioned by Barak) nearly led to a real war. It's hard to know who was happier: Sharon, who so cleverly triggered the uprisings, or the Palestinian lieutenants who led them.

By late last week, the truce brokered in Sharm al-Sheikh appeared at an end as the "Al Aksa Intifada" raged. Friday's edition of the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* reported that Barak's defense establishment is becoming increasingly convinced that Arafat does not intend to return to the Oslo process; the generals believe Arafat thinks that by increasing the violence, or even provoking a regional war, he will end up with an internationally brokered settlement and a larger Palestinian state than the one proposed at Camp David. "The current Intifada will continue, and perhaps even intensify," Marwan Barghouti, the secretary-general of Arafat's Fatah faction on the West Bank, insisted. "I personally don't want it to stop." What also awaits, conceivably, is a new American President who might want to stop the fighting but hasn't the slightest idea how. His education and rise in public life, after all, came at the ballpark, where the battles are all fun and games.

—*David Remnick*

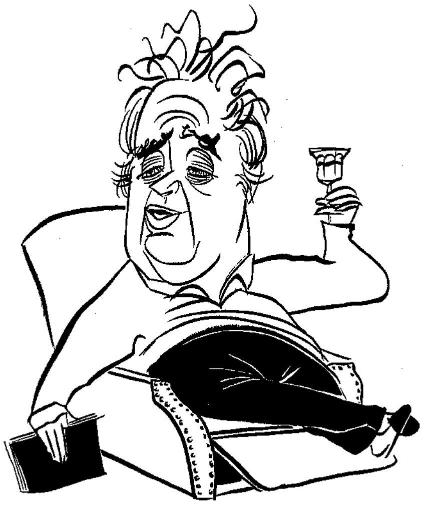
THE BOARDS
BLOOMSTAFF LIVE



Harold Bloom, our most sagacious, jocose, and overstuffed literary critic, has long harbored a love for the character of Falstaff, who is the platonic ideal of sagacity, jocosity, and overstuffedness. But although he has been analyzing and emulating the fat knight for fifty-odd years, Bloom has never attempted to enact the role. This evasion of destiny will be remedied on October 30th, at the Hasty Pudding Theatre, in Cambridge, when Bloom, accompanied by members of the American Repertory Theatre, incarnates Falstaff in a staged reading of selections from Shakespeare's Henry plays. "I've been playing this part my whole life," Bloom said recently. "I've just never played it on the stage before."

The reading is to be directed by Karin Coonrod, whose production of "King John" Bloom saw and admired earlier this year. Despite her encouragement, several of Bloom's friends have advised against the adventure.

"John Hollander said absolutely not," Bloom explained one recent Sunday afternoon, as he reclined, slipper-shod, on a brown leather BarcaLounger in his apartment on Washington Square North. "John said, 'You have a very eccentric way of chanting aloud, which is perfectly all right when you are in a seminar, but if you are surrounded by trained voices it will be a disaster.' " W. S. Merwin, the poet, was another doubter. "Merwin said, 'Twenty minutes into this, you are going to start sweating dreadfully, and you will have an overwhelming impulse to stop being Falstaff and return to being old Bloomstaff. You will start trying to explain to the audience how perfectly wonderful the speeches are.' "



Harold Bloom

The potential irruption of Bloom into Falstaff was one of the things that Bloom wished to work on that Sunday, in his first rehearsal with Coonrod, who arrived around sherry hour. The director perched on the edge of a settee and explained why Bloom was born to play Falstaff. "He's the vitalist who loves life," she said. Bloom poured himself a healthy glass of amontillado and subsided into his seat like a dollop of cake batter into a baking pan. He appeared more timorous than vital. "You'll have to correct me," he said anxiously.

"You'll be great," Coonrod said. Bloom launched into Falstaff's opening lines, spoken as he emerges from a drunken slumber, while Coonrod took the part of the coruscating Prince. ("Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack," she read.) Bloom was, perhaps, a little incantatory, but Coonrod issued little grunts of encouragement. "*Enjoy* it more," she said, and then added, "Yeah, yeah," when he hit a rollicking stride.

"Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing," he declared, smacking his lips over these favorite lines. "And now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked." Bloom could barely contain a chuckle. "Remind me not to laugh," he said. "I must not laugh."

"It's O.K. to laugh," Coonrod said.

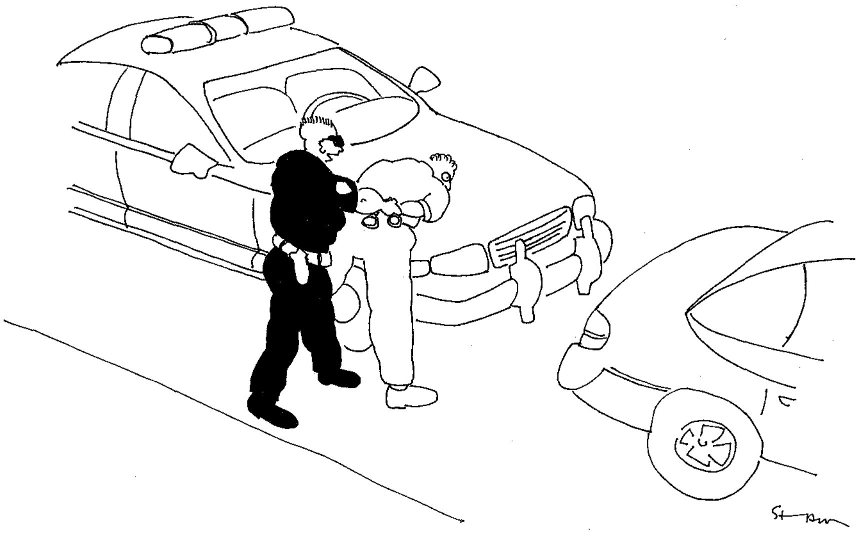
Bloom looked thoughtful, then, perhaps in a stab at Method acting, said, "If Falstaff makes *me* laugh, it's because he's making himself laugh."

The pair progressed to Act II, Scene 4, in which Falstaff and Prince Hal rehearse the Prince's forthcoming meeting with the King: "This chair shall be my state, this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown," Bloom-as-Falstaff-as-King intoned. Coonrod leaped up and fetched a pillow from a sofa, and Bloom balanced it on his head. Then he delivered the celebrated speech in which Falstaff makes a spirited defense of his modus vivendi—girth, excess, and all. "If to be fat is to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved," Bloom recited, and, at this, he looked up from his script and delivered the highest Bloomian compliment. "That line is *outrageous,*" he said. The director steered him back to the page.

Bloom is not a terribly physical actor: he delivered his lines semi-recumbent and motionless, although he did bat his eyelids dramatically when the text indicated heightened emotion. There will not be much opportunity for stage business in Cambridge, since Bloom and the other actors will be seated, but Bloom and Coonrod did rehearse the scene in which Falstaff, in battle, appears to die, only to rise again. (Bloom slumped back in his BarcaLounger, arms flung apart in the manner of the Crucifixion, then elevated himself, giggling.) And Bloom assured the director that he would dig out his old hip flask, which would do well for the scene in which Hal rummages in Falstaff's holster and finds, instead of a pistol, a bottle of sherry.

At the end of the afternoon, Bloom declared himself exhausted. "There is more to the old boy than there is to me, I am discovering," he said. The more he learned about acting, the more he seemed inclined to stick to teaching, particularly after Coonrod told him about an exercise she often asks actors to perform. "They run around the room, speaking the lines, to get some air into the words," she explained, upon which Bloom assumed his most Falstaffian look of dismay. "Oh, I am too old for that, my dear," he said. "I've had too much sack for that."

—*Rebecca Mead*



"You have the right to remain silent, you are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars. You have a right to be here. And, whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should."

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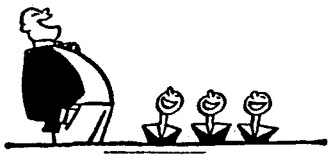
DEPT. OF CORRECT ANSWERS
QUIZ WHIZ



You may be a person of vast knowledge, able to rattle off answers—Yalta, 1066, the Taft-Hartley Act, Olduvai Gorge, Rogers Hornsby—to all kinds of questions, but unless you've been on a television game show you don't know this: it's all about the pickle. Several journalists found this out a few weeks ago when they were invited to be mock contestants on "History IQ," a new quiz show that began in early October on the History Channel and is on at seven-thirty every weeknight. Standing under bright lights in a Manhattan television studio, wired for sound, and with noses and foreheads deglazed by a makeup woman, three writers from three magazines practiced with the pickle, struggled with the pickle, and eventually came to terms with the pickle—the little button on the top of the handheld plastic buzzer (its business end, if you will), the mastery of which can make all the difference between walking away with a twenty-five-thousand-dollar grand prize and walking away wishing you hadn't told everyone you know that you were going to be on TV.

Before the taping began (the proceedings weren't going to be broadcast, and no real money was to be given away that day, but the game was taped anyway, to heighten the writers' feelings of excitement, hopefulness, and nausea), an assistant gave the players a brief tutorial in pickle-handling. She stressed the importance of waiting until the host finished asking a question before applying thumb to pickle, and warned that each time it's pressed there's a three-second "lockout," during which any further pressing won't register. This forced silence discourages contestants from frantically pressing the buzzer, machine-gun style—like a kid in class going "*Oh oh oh me me me me me!*" when the teacher asks a question—and gives the other contestants a chance to have a fair crack at things. Then Marc Summers, the host of "History IQ," came into the studio and greeted the writers, who were lined up on three platforms set just far enough apart to make fistfights between the competitors difficult. Summers, a youthful-looking man in his late forties with wavy blond hair, has a substantial résumé as a TV host, and is well remembered by the greatest generation's grandchildren for his nearly decade-long association with Nickelodeon's "Double Dare," a game show for kids that featured messy physical challenges and generous dumpings of green slime (an amalgam of vanilla pudding, applesauce, oatmeal, and food coloring) on the little darlings' heads when they answered questions incorrectly.

"History IQ" consists of three rounds, with one contestant being eliminated after each of the first two rounds. In order to shield the identities of the participants, the three seekers after glory shall be referred to here as A, from *Brill's Content;* B, from *Newsweek;* and Killer, from the magazine that was, as those with a high history I.Q. will know, founded in 1925 by Harold Ross. To satisfy himself that their pickle-pushing skills were up to snuff, Summers asked some warmup questions, such as "Who played the part of Fred Mertz on 'I Love Lucy'?" Killer got this one, and seemed well on her way to establishing herself as lord of the pickle, but when the pressure was on—when Summers started asking the real questions—it appeared that A had the best mind-thumb coordination, and he got to answer the first question, which was about Ford's famous fifties dud, the Edsel. In an aside to each other, B and Killer, huddling together for warmth in their cave of failure, confirmed that they, too, knew the answer, and tacitly agreed to blame the equipment. Things were all A and B for a while, and B had an impressive run with some questions related to

PROVERBS ACCORDING TO DENNIS MILLER

1. A rolling stone . . . if not acted upon by any force will keep rolling in a straight line at the same speed.
2. Every cloud has . . . water vapor that has the potential of producing ice crystals or raindrops, depending on the Bergeron or coalescence process.
3. The grass is always greener . . . if it receives an adequate supply of $C_{55}H_{70}MgN_4O_6$.
4. A penny saved . . . if doubled every day for two months would be worth more than the combined GNP of the industrialized nations of the world.
5. A bird in the hand . . . is dead or alive, depending on one's will.
6. What goes up . . . will stay up if it has an escape velocity of 11.3 kilometres per second.
7. When the cat's away . . . the mice will play cautiously if it's Schrödinger's cat.
8. People who live in glass houses . . . are surrounded by a strange hybrid of solid liquids or liquid solids.
9. Nothing is certain but death and . . . Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.
10. There's a time and place . . . but not before the big bang.

—*Johnny Carson*

Caesar (the emperor *and* the salad), but Killer made an unexpected surge when the subject turned to the Dust Bowl, and before B knew what had hit him he was walking away with an empty wallet and a consolatory "History IQ" T-shirt, muttering the kind of thing people in his position always mutter—you know, something about how he had to get back to the office anyway, because he had a deadline.

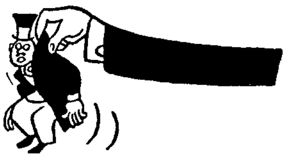
Killer began the second round with four hundred dollars and A with three hundred and fifty, and it would be too cruel to explain in detail exactly how it was that Killer ended the round with a thousand dollars and A with two hundred and fifty. Perhaps it had to do with Killer's having some twenty years on A, or perhaps A was having a problem with his pickle; all that really needs to be said is that by the time a question about the Titanic came around—a subject whose lore Killer happens to know fore and aft—A was beginning to understand how Ernie Els must feel when he's paired up with Tiger Woods.

The third round of "History IQ" is the hardest, or so Killer has reported. After the second-round loser, smiling politely on the outside and crying like a baby on the inside, has been led away, the remaining contestant sits alone at a console with an electronic touch screen on it and attempts, in sixty seconds, to match ten headlines of a given decade with the correct year. Killer's ten headlines covered the years 1931-40, and she got only three of them right: the years that Prohibition ended (1933), Huey Long was shot (1935), and "The Wizard of Oz" was released (1939). Still, each correct matchup was worth five hundred dollars, so the sting of Killer's ignorance was supplanted almost immediately by the glow of having earned twenty-five hundred theoretical dollars in a half hour—enough to buy some really nice theoretical clothes or go on a theoretical romantic vacation for two. And Killer, having climbed out of the dustbin of history once, has declared that she could do it again any old time. A and B, however, have not answered calls for a rematch, which, in truth, is completely understandable—they are only human, and there are few among us who could stand losing to a pickle twice.

—*Nancy Franklin*

DEPT. OF INERTIA

SAVE THE COUNCILMEN!



If power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, then serving on the New York City Council is a pretty low-risk proposition. In 1999, the council passed eighty pieces of legislation. Of these, thirty-six authorized the renaming of city streets, or parts of streets, in honor of various civic heroes, a saint, a poet, and a baker. Another sixteen represented the approval of decisions that had already been made by the Taxi and Limousine Commission.

Over the years, the council has taken a good deal of abuse for its ineffectualness; one council member even compared the body—unfavorably—to a rubber stamp. ("A rubber stamp at least leaves an impression," he said.) But derision never led to anything much more consequential. In the last municipal election, for example, every incumbent on the council (except for one who had served for less than a year) won reëlection.

Now, however, as a result of New York City's term-limit law, most of the council's fifty-one members are about to lose their jobs. Thirty-six of them will be barred from running for reëlection next year, and another eleven will be forced out two years after that, so that by 2004 there will be no one left in the legislature who has more than five years' experience. In recent weeks, this realization has produced a sense of impending crisis in the council, though not, it must be acknowledged, a great deal of consternation anywhere else.

Term limits in New York are themselves essentially an accident. For some reason, in the late nineteen-eighties, Ronald Lauder, the cosmetics heir, became taken with the idea of making a contribution to municipal life. First, he ran for mayor, in 1989, spending fourteen million dollars to win only thirty-seven thousand votes in the Republican primary. Four years after that, he decided to spend another million pushing term limits.

Since then, voters in the city have twice voiced their approval for term limits. Nonetheless, the council members could still try to rewrite the law to allow them to keep their jobs. In the last few weeks, several of them have invoked an obscure 1961 decision issued on a similar case in Buffalo as legal precedent for just such a move. "There is no motive stronger than self-interest, and I don't think that's a negative," Councilman Phil Reed, of Manhattan, said.

Just by considering changes in term limits, the council has opened itself up to a new round of public ridicule. But there is something almost poignant about its current predicament. In the past, council members could always fall back on inaction as the simplest way to survive. Now this option is no longer viable; but neither, probably, is the alternative.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

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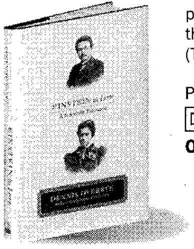

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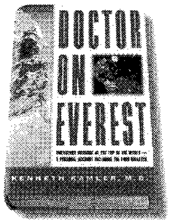

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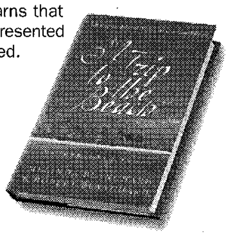

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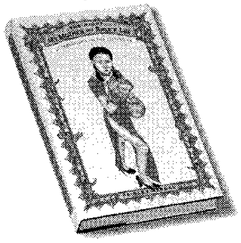

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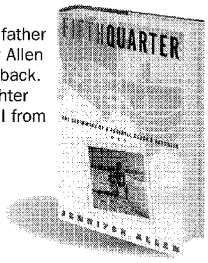

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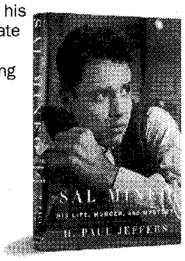

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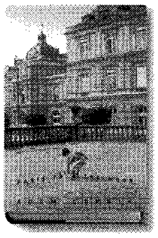

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT

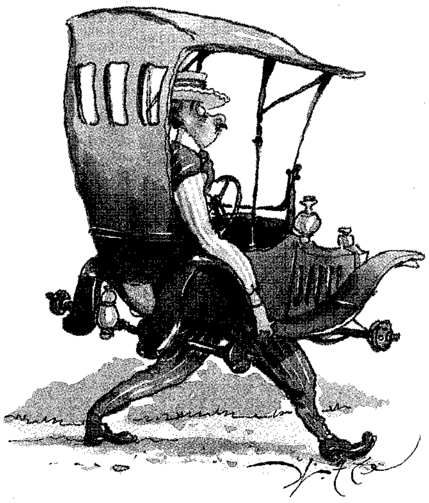
In 1927, Henry Ford grew tired of worrying about whether his company would be able to get enough rubber for the tires on its Model A's, and he decided to do something about it. The logical solution would have been to sign long-term contracts with Asian rubber growers, thereby guaranteeing himself a reliable supply. But Henry Ford was not always a logical man. He chose instead to grow his own. At considerable cost, the company carved a rubber plantation out of the Amazon jungle and set out to supply itself, so that no Model A would ever go tireless again.

The plantation, on a tract of land three times the size of Rhode Island, was named Fordlandia. It featured a town with schools, churches, a rubber factory, and a golf course. In the end, though, the jungle won. Blight struck the rubber groves, and the workers rebelled. In 1945, Ford gave up on Fordlandia.

Fordlandia is usually held up as an example of Henry Ford's obsession with what is called "vertical integration." In his view, whatever went into a Ford should be owned and manufactured by Ford. But Fordlandia was also driven by something else: a desire never to run short. Ford spent millions on his ill-fated plantation because he preferred the certainty of having too much rubber to the uncertainty of not having enough. He appreciated the old proverb: You can't sell from an empty wagon.

Things change. In this age of lean production, companies are like prizefighters constantly worried about making their weight. While Ford fretted about not having enough parts on hand, companies today dread having too many. They carry as little inventory as possible. They buy parts only when they have to. Many of them seem to own only their ideas and their brand names. Even when they do own factories, the emphasis is always on making do with as little as possible.

Generally, the streamlining of manufacturing has been a good thing. The less money a company has tied up in inventory, the more it can invest in building a business. But lean production works only if you can get the parts you need when you need them. And over the past few months we've seen what happens when you can't: you run out of products to sell. The electronics industry, for example, is currently afflicted with shortages. Tantalum capacitors, flash memory, liquid-crystal displays, DRAM chips: the supply of all these components is falling well short of demand. That's why it's hard to find a new Palm, or a Compaq iPaq computer, or certain high-end cell phones, and why this Thursday when you rush down to Toys R Us to buy a new Sony PlayStation 2 the salesclerk will tell you that you'll be lucky to get one in a few months. This is bad for both seller and buyer: Sony misses out on easy sales, and the PlayStation junkie faces another season without Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore.



For this state of affairs you can blame Toyota. In the nineteen-seventies, Toyota pioneered a way of making cars that kept inventories low and productivity high. In what Toyota called a "just-in-time" system, parts would appear only when workers needed them. Toyota's factories were pristine and spare, uncluttered with excess inventories—all muscle, no fat.

By now, it's hard to find a factory anywhere that hasn't experimented with some form of just-in-time manufacturing. Michael Dell became a boychik wonder by perfecting the model—building computers only after customers order them and keeping less than a week's inventory on hand. In a sense, Dell, the avatar of this approach, is the anti-Ford.

But the just-in-time model has a hidden flaw. The Dells and Toyotas of the world essentially want the benefits of the rubber plantation but not the risk. They want someone else—namely, their suppliers—to be their Fordlandia. Dell Computers builds only what it knows it will sell. It can do this solely because its suppliers make millions of parts that they *hope* they can sell. That's nice if you're Dell. But what if you're one of those suppliers?

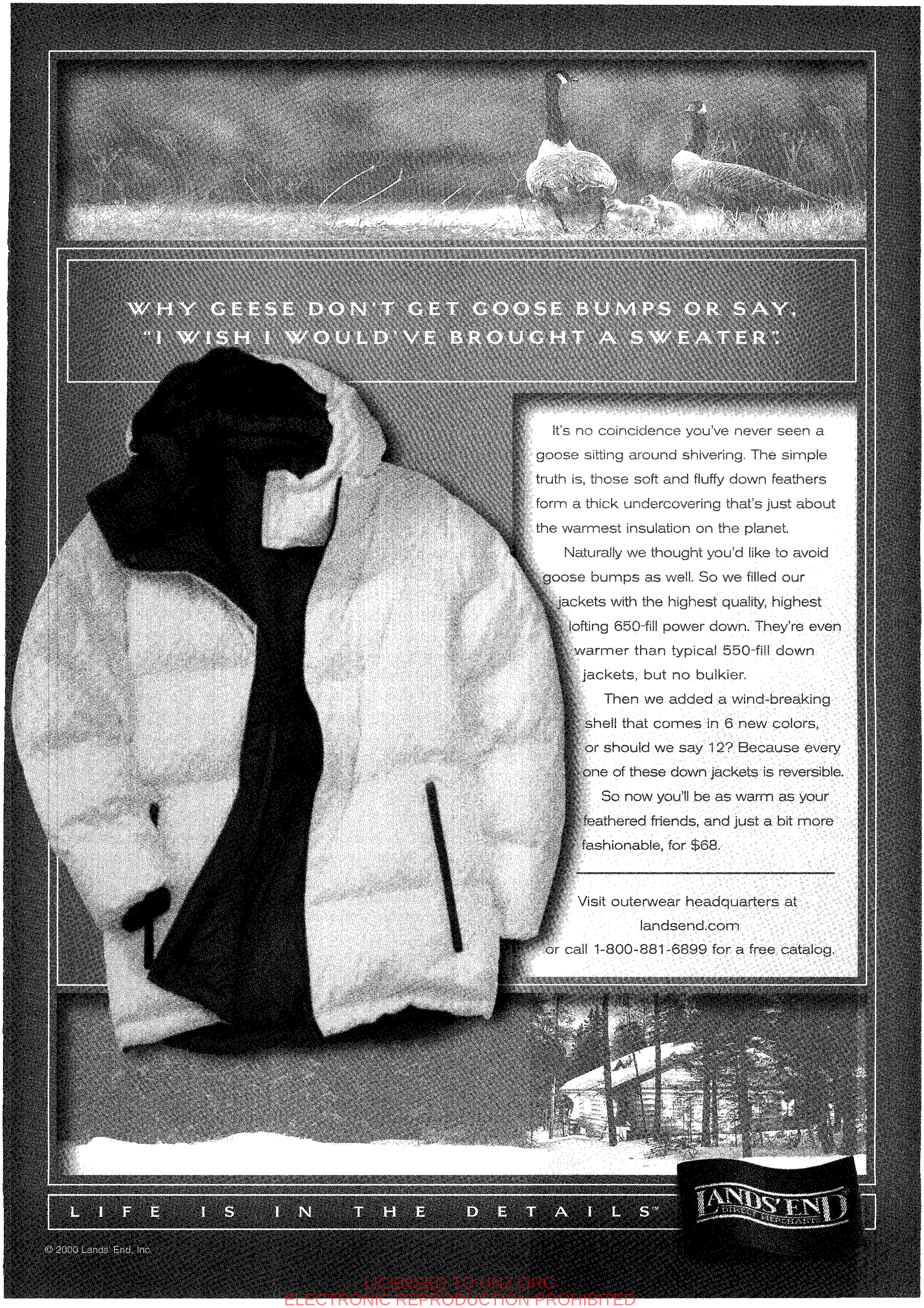
The problem is that when suppliers themselves shy away from risk, they make fewer parts. Several years ago, when it looked as if the Asian economy was going off a cliff, parts makers cut back sharply. They didn't build new factories or add production lines, because they feared that their customers—the brand manufacturers—would stop buying. They were wrong. Now they are trying to catch up. But, in the meantime, Palm, for example, has sold tens of thousands fewer organizers than it could have.

The just-in-time model is designed to liberate manufacturers from having to predict what customers want. Forecasting demand is a mug's game. Companies nimble enough to react to demand, instead of having to anticipate it, have a distinct advantage in the marketplace. But something has become clear, amid the recent product shortages: These nimble companies never really did away with the pesky business of forecasting demand. They just shifted it along to their suppliers. Call it the conservation of uncertainty: you can pass it down the supply chain, but you can't get rid of it. In this case, just-in-time manufacturers left the equipment makers with the risk. And now the manufacturers are paying the price.

To deal with the problem, companies are signing longer-term contracts with suppliers or becoming a little less lean, stocking up on months instead of weeks of inventory. And some measure of vertical integration might even be making a comeback. So go ahead, Michael, say it: *Dell-landia.* It's got a ring to it, doesn't it?

—*James Surowiecki*

MICHAEL WITTE



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ANNALS OF LAW

WOMEN IN BLACK

Female judges are more compassionate than men, the theory goes. Not in Texas.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

Since 1976, Texas has executed two hundred and thirty-two people, which is more than a third of all the people put to death in the United States in the same period. And Harris County, in the heart of Texas, stands out: it has accounted for sixty-three executions—more than all of Florida, which ranks third among states, with forty-nine executions, and nearly as many as Virginia, which is in second place, with eighty. Harris County, which includes Houston, has another distinction: its criminal courthouse is one of the few in the country where a majority of the judges—twelve of twenty-one—are women.

This year, the death penalty in Texas has often been viewed through the prism of George W. Bush's Presidential candidacy. Despite Bush's expressions of enthusiasm, in the October 11th Presidential debate, over the fact that the men who killed James Byrd by dragging him behind a pickup truck were sentenced to death, the Texas governor's real influence over the issue is modest: he cannot apply the death penalty; he can only delay, not prevent, executions. A more appropriate context in which to examine capital punishment in Texas, where more than a third of the judges are women, is gender; the state has become a kind of laboratory for a quiet transformation of the American judiciary. Indeed, the Texas experience may answer what had been a hypothetical question: would it make a difference in enforcing the death penalty if women were in charge?

The subject of women's influence on the judiciary—and even of a distinctively female style of judging—has drawn the interest of scholars since the nineteen-eighties, when women started ascending to the bench in significant numbers. (Twenty-four per cent of the judges in New York and twenty-one per cent in California are women.) Some researchers posited that women would bring a special kind of compassion to the bench. But in Texas, at least, women judges have enforced the criminal law in general and the death penalty in particular with a greater ferocity than their male predecessors. It is a development that owes much to the state's political environment—to its swift transition from Democratic dominance to near-total Republican hegemony—but the fact remains that the increase in the number of women judges in Texas has coincided with the surge in executions in the state.

Judge Susan Brown is one of the twelve female judges on the Harris County Criminal District Court. (In Texas, felony cases are tried in the district court. They may then be appealed to the courts of appeals, where eighty judges are divided into fourteen regions and sit in panels of three. The highest court is the Court of Criminal Appeals, which has nine judges, who are elected in statewide races.) Brown remembers precisely when she decided to become a lawyer. "I was reading this Sidney Sheldon novel, which my mother, good Catholic girl, probably would not have approved of," she told me recently, in her chambers in the Harris County Criminal Justice Center. "And there was this woman defense lawyer in it. That woman from 'Charlie's Angels' played her in the movie. And it was so glamorous and exciting that I decided then and there that's what I wanted to do."

Unlike the character that Jaclyn Smith played in "Rage of Angels," though, Brown, the former Susan Baetz, did not come from a privileged background. Her father worked for a moving company in Houston, and her mother was a travel agent. No one in her immediate family had gone to college, but she won admission to Texas A. & M. and then to South Texas College of Law, in Houston. Upon graduation, she set out to become a trial lawyer.

RICHARD THOMPSON

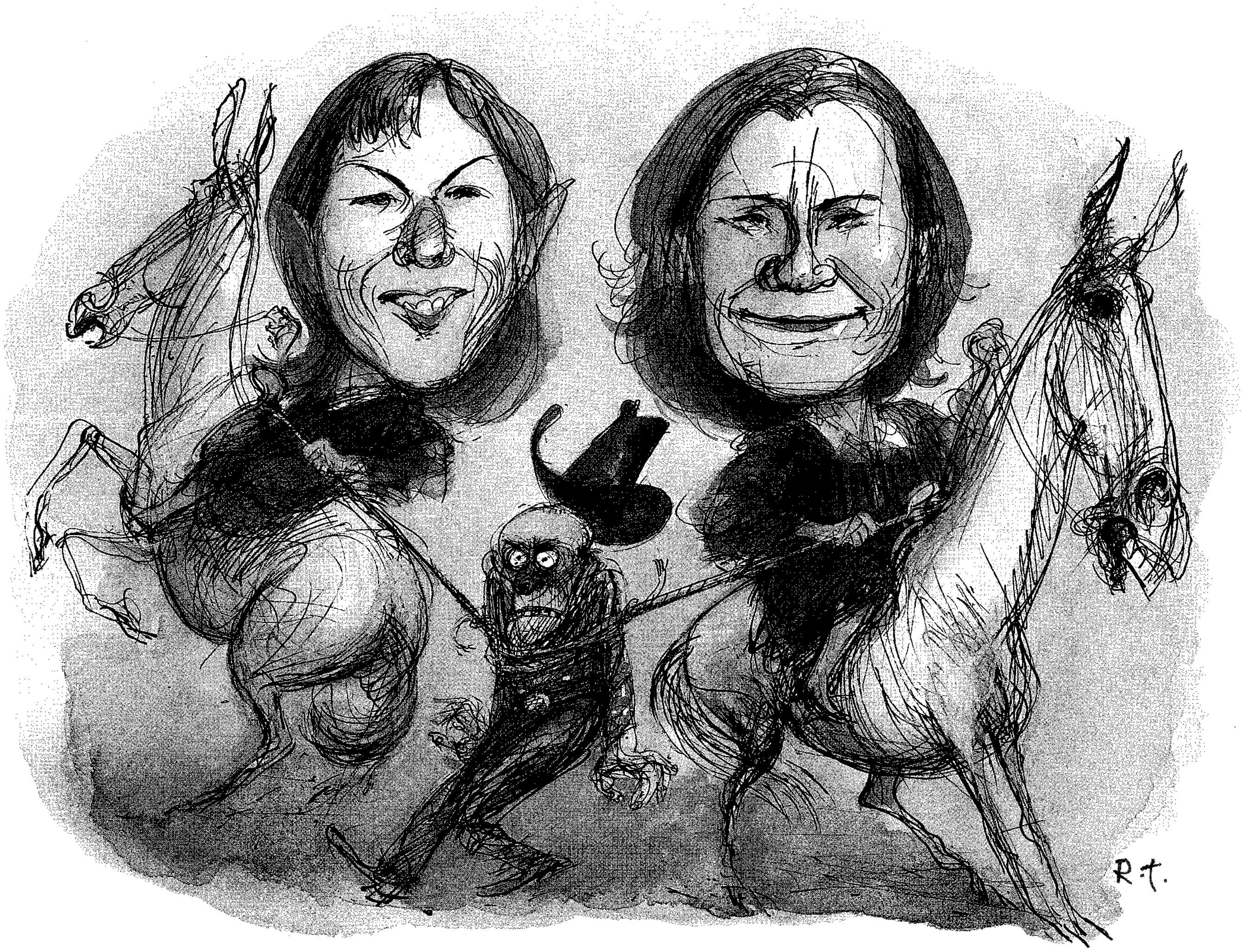
Brown, who is forty, could still pass for a law student, with her pageboy haircut and breezy, unpretentious manner; each time I entered her chambers, I noticed her judicial robe thrown unceremoniously over a chair. When we met, she had just returned from a short vacation that included a trip to a local water park with her husband and two young daughters. But youth, charm, and informality notwithstanding, Brown is typical of the new sort of woman judge in Texas: she is a Republican, a former prosecutor, and an unyielding judicial conservative.

"If you wanted trial experience, you really had no choice but to become a prosecutor," Brown told me during one of several conversations. "It's a lot harder to get experience on the other side of the fence." Texas, for the most part, does not use a public-defender system. Instead, judges appoint lawyers for indigent defendants on a case-by-case basis, a system that gives judges a ready-made base for campaign contributions and, some say, discourages zealous advocacy for the defense. (Lawyers must always worry about offending a judge who is a future source of appointments.) So Brown found a job in a district attorney's office north of Dallas. "I loved it," she said. "It's fun to be the guy in the white hat."

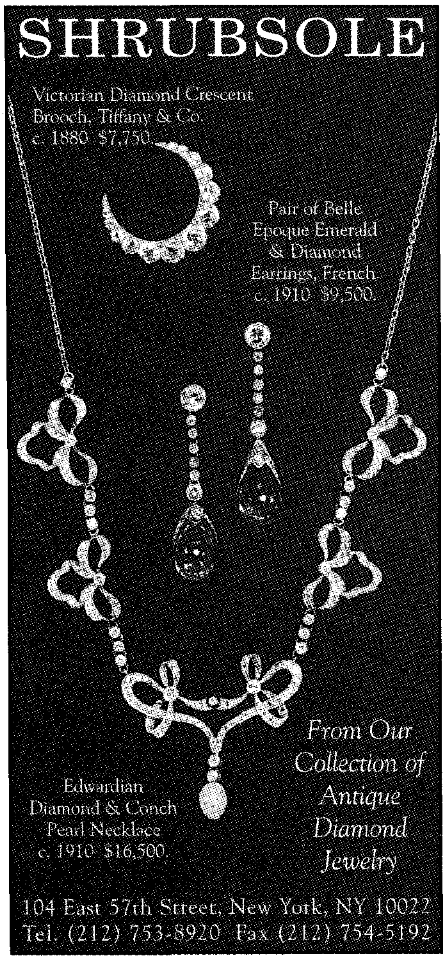
After a couple of years, Brown moved to the Harris County district attorney's office, in Houston (where she met her husband, Marc, who remains a senior prosecutor there). In the eighties, women who had gone to work for district attorneys were thriving. They did not, however, make comparable strides in the private sector, which depends on paying clients. "We don't want to have to get business by going to dinner with people and playing golf with them," one woman judge told me. "You don't have to worry about getting clients in a D.A.'s office. There's always plenty of business, and you can just be a lawyer." Unlike the old boys' networks, in Texas and elsewhere, district attorneys' offices operate as relative meritocracies.

"I did a lot of capital cases as a prosecutor," Brown told me, going on to say that she asked for the death penalty from juries on six occasions, and they agreed five times. (Under Texas law, only juries, not judges, can impose the death penalty.) "It is hard for twelve citizens to give someone the death penalty," Brown said. "I've watched these jurors struggle and cry as they do it. It bothers me that people think it's so easy, that they just give the death penalty to anybody." Brown's first death-penalty case as a prosecutor was that of Arthur Brown, who was convicted in 1993 of the execution-style murder of four people in connection with a drug deal gone bad. The defendant is still appealing, and the Judge, frustrated, told me, "I can't believe how long it's taking."

In time, like many prosecutors, Brown



Judges like Susan Brown and Sharon Keller, of Texas, have, if anything, enforced the death penalty with greater ferocity than their male predecessors. "I don't think women judges are more liberal," Brown said. "At least, not my friends."



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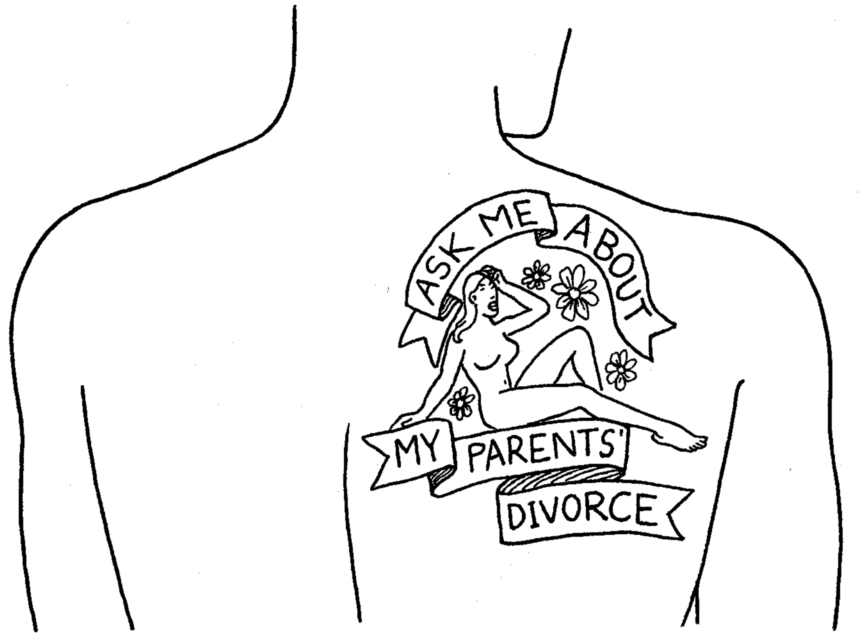

THE SUBTEXT OF ALL TATTOOS

thought about moving up to a judgeship. Judges in Texas are elected, though the governor can fill vacancies, and it is mostly through judicial elections that women have made their dramatic gains. Harris County residents often have to vote in several dozen judicial races at a time, so the challenge for prospective candidates is to generate name recognition. Like most candidates for the criminal judicial bench, Brown had little money—she ultimately spent about thirty thousand dollars—but she had been active in the Republican Party for some time, and she understood the rules in Houston. "These elections are about endorsements," she told me. "And when you get those, that's it."

In pursuit of a judgeship, Susan Brown sought the support of Steven Hotze, a Houston physician who in the past decade has become the chief gatekeeper to the local judiciary. From the start, Hotze saw the potential of female judicial candidates, and he welcomed them onto the ballot—as long as they met his ideological requirements.

Hotze, who has a thriving practice as an allergist, first gained prominence in 1985, when he led the successful opposition to a gay-rights voter initiative in Houston. (His group was called the Straight Slate.) In later years, he emerged as the preëminent conservative figure in Harris County. According to Allen Blakemore, a political consultant in Houston who frequently works with Hotze, the doctor made a critical discovery about the nature of judicial elections. "We're now in a Republican-only context in Harris County," Blakemore said. "The primary is the only thing that matters. And in judicial elections no one knows anything about the candidates, and it's a tiny, tiny group of people voting—maybe a hundred and fifty thousand out of 1.6 million registered voters. Hotze took the time to figure it out—that it's only worth trying to reach the people who are going to vote. So he came up with the idea of the voter guide."

Hotze's voter guides distill his views into a chart, which contains two columns—one marked "Conservative Republicans," the other "Liberals"—and lists the two groups' contrasting views of the issues: for instance, "For capital punishment" or "Oppose capital punishment"; "For traditional family values" or "For teaching homosexuality as an acceptable alternative life style"; "For the sanctity of human life" or "For abortion on demand." Senior citizens can vote by mail in Harris County, so Hotze sends them preprinted applications for ballots. "That's why Steven Hotze has such a big impact," Judge Brown told me. "When you go down a ballot, folks don't know who to vote for. He tells you."

Hotze and his allies recoiled at the idea of naming defense attorneys to the bench, so they looked to the district attorney's office, and found an abundance of qualified, aggressive prosecutors who happened to be women. As head of a group called the Conservative Republicans of Harris County, Hotze began endorsing slates of candidates in judicial elections. In a context where candidates lack the resources to reach voters on their own—and where only the most motivated party members vote at all—Hotze's endorsements became the single most important factor in Harris County judicial elections.

For most of the past ten years, Hotze has refused to speak to reporters. ("It helps with the mystique," Blakemore explained. "He's the guy behind the scenes that nobody sees, kind of like the Wizard of Oz.") However, Hotze did outline his political theories in an opinion piece in the Houston *Chronicle* on December 13, 1992. There he described a host of the country's ills, from crime to the national debt, and asked, "What is the reason for this decay and impending collapse of our nation? We have abandoned the Christian faith of our forefathers." He went on in that spirit, concluding, "If we are to survive as a nation and maintain our liberties, then we must get back to the basics and restore our nation to its Christian heritage."

The candidates themselves operate in this conservative context. "We don't have moderates here," Gary Polland, the chairman of the Harris County Republican Party, told me. "We have economic conservatives and social conservatives." According to Allen Blakemore, degrees of toughness, sometimes seen as a gauge of conservative commitment, count for a lot in these local elections. "Prosecutors and incumbent judges will brag about their stats," Blakemore said. " 'I sent *x* number of people to death row.' 'I sentenced *x* number of people to life terms.' "

In a curious way, the rough political environment of Texas may help women candidates. "Where women have a better record than men is that we have not been caught doing crooked things," Ann Richards, the former Democratic governor, who was defeated by Bush in 1994, told me. "A lot of people tend to vote for women because they think we're more clean than the men." This theory of an edge for women candidates was at least partially borne out this spring when Hotze, along with his usual victories, suffered a rare pair of defeats. Two of his judicial candidates lost to incumbent women.

In 1998, Susan Brown ran a classic Hotze-style Republican campaign; the doctor even listed her as one of his "featured races." Recalling her interview with Hotze, when she sought his support, Brown said, "He just wants to know where you are, law-enforcement-wise and in terms of experience. He's very conservative. So am I." Like several other female candidates, Brown also benefitted from the Texas tradition of women's clubs, a Republican institution that thrived even when Democrats dominated the state. In Houston alone, there are several, including the Daughters of Liberty and the Texas Tea Party, which are unflinchingly conservative, and the Magic Circle, which is more moderate. "The clubs are where you get your precinct chairmen," Brown said of her fellow club members. "They'll send notes to their friends. It's really important."

Brown won a lopsided victory in the 1998 Republican primary, defeating an incumbent, Lon Harper, with almost seventy-five per cent of the vote. Harper had damaged himself by admitting to a reporter that he needed to work only a half day to get through his docket. Several lawyers and judges in Houston told me that Harper's statement, though politically disastrous, was actually true, and it constitutes another reason that the judgeships work well for those concerned about a balance between job and family. "We've broken through the glass ceiling," Brown told me.

Judge Brown isn't inclined to make sweeping statements about her judicial philosophy, but her priorities are easy to identify. On the day we met, she had recently presided over her first capital case as a judge. (In that case, the twenty-year-old defendant, Juan Martin Garcia, was sentenced to death for shooting a man in

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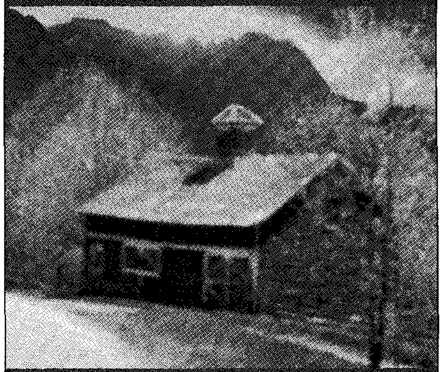

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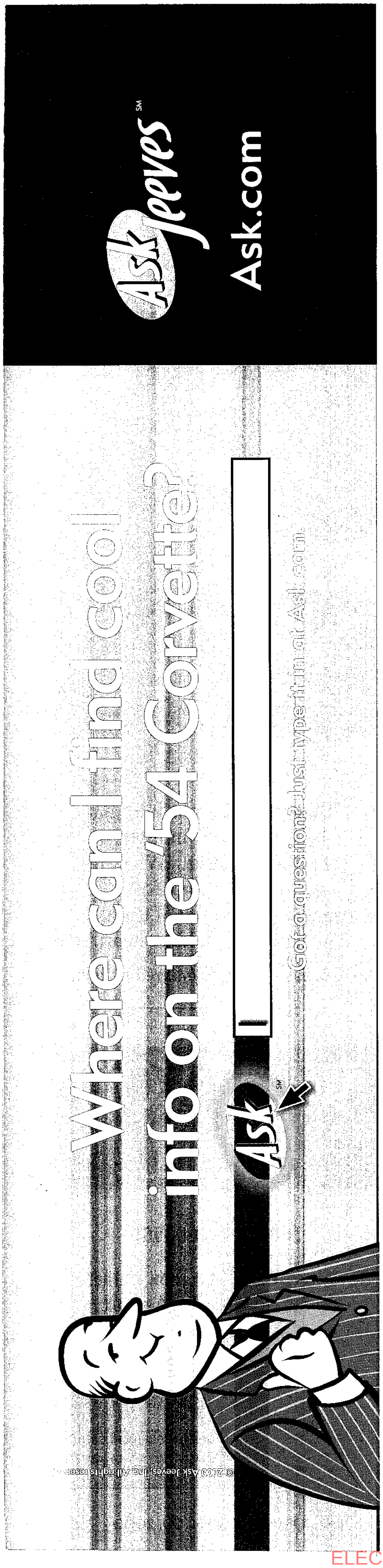
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the course of a robbery that netted eight dollars.) Because, under Texas law, jurors decide whether to impose the death penalty, I asked Brown how long it took to select a jury in a capital case. "About three weeks," she told me. "It takes that long to cull out the people who can't give the death penalty."

There was nothing legally inaccurate about this approach; it is part of a judge's obligation in death-penalty cases to draw out jurors on the subject. But Brown's emphasis on jury selection as a kind of weeding-out process for those unwilling to impose death was a little unsettling just the same. I saw similar factors at work when I watched Brown supervise jury selection in a case involving possession of a small amount of heroin. In Texas, juries can impose sentence in all criminal cases, so Brown asked a long series of questions about whether the prospective jurors thought sentences of twenty-five to ninety-nine years were excessive for possession of less than a gram of heroin. (The potential sentences were so high because the defendant was a prior offender.) Under Brown's probing questions, virtually all the prospective black and Hispanic jurors conceded that they thought such sentences were too long, and thus disqualified themselves from consideration. A jury later convicted the defendant and sentenced him to thirty years.

Like George W. Bush, Brown sees herself as a compassionate conservative. "I don't think women judges are more liberal—at least, not my friends," Brown told me. "We are probably more empathetic, rather than sympathetic. I sit up there—and this is something I never expected—and I don't just think about my poor victim, as I did when I was a prosecutor. Sure, the defendant made his bed and he has to lie in it. But I also think about the poor mother of the defendant sitting out there who is not going to have her son home for Christmas. They have done everything they can for this kid, but he's still a bank robber or a drug dealer." She brightened, saying, "So maybe I give them forty years instead of fifty years." Many defense lawyers, in Texas and elsewhere, feel that women judges overcompensate for the perceived weakness of their gender. For her part, Brown rejects this theory, and her rulings from the bench do seem consistent with her professional and political orientation.

Clearly, Brown believes in handing out long sentences. In 1993, a Gulf War veteran named Ronald Margolis stopped his car and asked a group of teen-age girls for directions. Three of the four girls later told police that Margolis had been masturbating at the time, and he pleaded guilty to "indecency with a child." Brown's predecessor sentenced Margolis to seven years' probation, and his record stayed clean for nearly six years. In 1999, Margolis admitted to his probation officer that he had drunk beer on weekends, which was a violation of the terms of probation, and that he had gone innertubing in nearby New Braunfels without the permission of his probation officer. There was also an unproved allegation that Margolis had flashed a housekeeper in his mother's home, but he was never charged with sexual misconduct while on probation. Still, in light of these violations, Judge Brown sentenced Margolis to ten years in state prison. After he is released, he will be required to register with the police as a sex offender for the rest of his life. "I believe in keeping my probationers on a short leash," Brown told me.

When scholars began trying to see patterns in the behavior of women judges, most did not count on the rise of judicial conservatives like Susan Brown. The first formal study of the subject took place in 1986, when Suzanna Sherry, then a professor at the University of Minnesota Law School, decided to examine the question by focussing primarily on the work of Sandra Day O'Connor, who was then in her fifth year on the United States Supreme Court. Sherry told me that her study grew out of the controversial work of the sociologist Carol Gilligan, whose 1982 book "In a Different Voice" remains the best-known statement of what is sometimes called "difference feminism."

Sherry's article, "Civic Virtue and the Feminine Voice in Constitutional Adjudication," published in the *Virginia Law Review,* was full of caveats that her evidence was incomplete and her conclusions tentative. Yet the article continues to be cited as the leading argument for the proposition that a "feminine paradigm" exists for judges. Drawing on the findings and the language of psychological and literary theory, Sherry wrote about women's more "intersubjective sense of self" and a "difference between the abstraction of men and the concreteness of women." Her conclusion, though, was straightforward: Sherry suggested that a woman's jurisprudence would be suspicious of hard-and-fast rules—in short, it would be "merciful, just, and compassionate."

This hypothesis has proved difficult to test. There is no practical way to provide male and female judges—especially trial-court judges, who work alone—with identical issues to resolve; moreover, it can be difficult to identify which result in a given case is more or less "female." To the extent that scholars have been able to make evaluations, though, the results in more recent years have not been favorable to the Gilligan-Sherry school. According to a more comprehensive, but still mostly anecdotal, study by Michael E. Solimine and Susan E. Wheatley, which was published in the *Indiana Law Journal* in 1995, "The weight of the evidence demonstrates that most female judges do not decide cases in a distinctively feminist or feminine manner." As Solimine told me, "It seems that other parts of judges' backgrounds—like their party affiliation and their prior professional history—matter more than whether they are men or women."

Throughout Texas, Susan Brown has ideological soul mates who are mostly ex-prosecutors and all Republicans—including Gerry Meier and Karen Greene, in Dallas; Sharen Wilson, in Fort Worth; Cynthia Kent, in Tyler; and Sharon MacRae, in San Antonio—but these trial judges preside over only one case at a time and do not establish binding precedents. In Texas, that role belongs to the Court of Criminal Appeals (the Texas Supreme Court, to which Governor Bush has appointed four judges to fill vacancies, handles only civil cases), and it is in the Court of Criminal Appeals that a woman has transformed her state's application of the death penalty.

The key figure on the court is Judge Sharon Keller, who, oddly, drew little notice during her days as an assistant district attorney in Dallas. During her career there, which lasted from 1986 to 1994, she worked in a relative backwater, the appellate section, where she drafted briefs and argued appeals. "She was very nice and unassuming and sort of quiet

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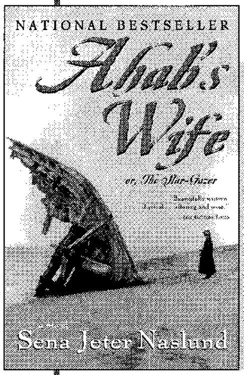

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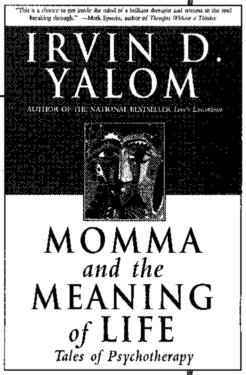
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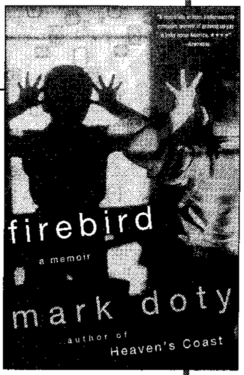

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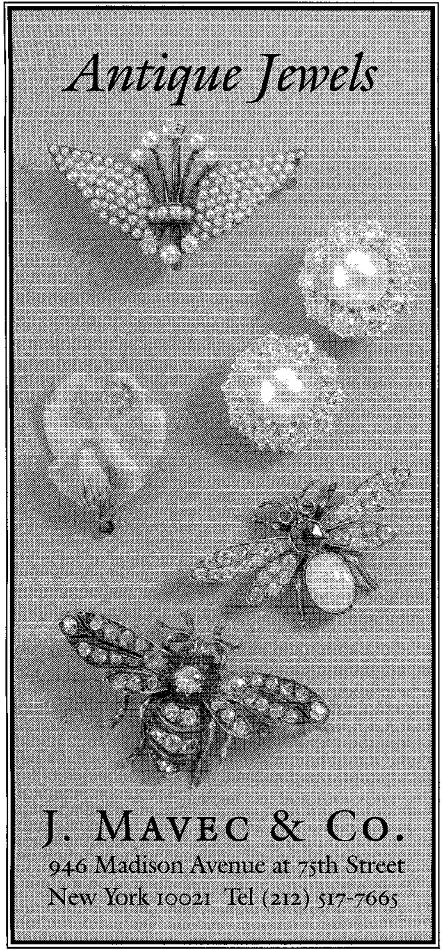

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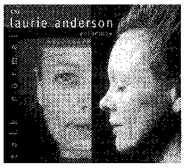

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and shy," a former colleague told me. "Nobody thought of her as someone who could go out and be a politician." But Keller, who is divorced and has one son, had ambitions beyond the confines of the D.A.'s library, and she had an advantage that few prosecutors could match. Her family operated Keller's Drive-Ins, a successful hamburger chain in Dallas, and she decided to invest part of the proceeds from the business in a career as a judge.

Keller ran a Hotze-style campaign statewide, emphasizing her experience as a prosecutor and her toughness on crime. According to statistics compiled by the public-interest research group Texans for Public Justice, most of the money for Keller's first campaign, in 1994—more than two hundred thousand dollars—came from Keller and her family. One of her newspaper advertisements showed hands behind jail bars and announced that this person would not be voting for Keller. Another ad proclaimed, "Sharon Keller believes criminals deserve a home of their own. In Huntsville"—at the time, the site of death row. She won a six-year term amid the Republican victories of that year and immediately asserted herself on the court.

"Sharon Keller is probably the most ideologically conservative member of the court, in the Clarence Thomas–Antonin Scalia mold," says Robert Dawson, a professor at the University of Texas law school who follows the Court of Criminal Appeals closely. Between 1993 and 1999, the court went from nine Democrats to nine Republicans, but even within this transition Keller's opinions stood out for their pro-prosecution orientation. According to Charles Baird, a Democratic judge who was voted off the Court of Criminal Appeals in 1998, "It's a profound evolution, from moderate to extreme right wing. She was the first one who ran on the issue of being tough on crime. As we say in Texas, it's the big dog that eats. They have the votes, and it didn't matter what those of us in the minority said. She is pursuing her own philosophical agenda."

As Keller promised in her campaigns, she has been extremely reluctant to set aside convictions or death sentences. In 1996, for example, Keller upheld the death sentence given to Cesar Fierro, who, in 1979, had confessed to a murder after Mexican police seized his mother and stepfather and threatened to attach an electrical generator known as a *chacharra* to the stepfather's genitals. In an opinion, she ruled that the coercive nature of the investigation should not invalidate Fierro's conviction and sentence. In two cases where defendants were sentenced to death after trials during which their attorneys dozed off in the courtroom, Keller voted with the majority to uphold their convictions. According to statistics compiled by the Chicago *Tribune*, the court has granted new trials to death-row inmates just eight times since 1995, and in those eight cases Keller was in the pro-execution minority six times.

Keller's term expires at the end of this year, but, instead of seeking reëlection, she is risking her seat to run for presiding judge of the court—the most important criminal judgeship in Texas. Her opponent in the primary was Tom Price, a fellow Republican judge on the court—"I call him a liberal," Keller said in the campaign—and she won their contest handily. She will face token Democratic opposition in November.

The evidence from Texas suggests that although diversity may serve some laudable goals—creating equal opportunities, dispelling stereotypes—it has had a minimal impact on the quality of justice meted out by the Texas courts. Judge Keller's most famous decision to date—her opinion in the Roy Criner case—illustrates the point. On September 27, 1986, a sixteen-year-old ninth grader named Deanna Ogg set out on foot for her grandmother's house in a small town north of Houston. That evening, she was sexually assaulted and bludgeoned to death. A local man named Roy Criner was convicted of aggravated sexual assault, largely on the basis of disputed confessions that he had made to three friends shortly after the crime. He was sentenced to ninety-nine years in prison.

More than a decade after the crime, Criner's attorneys ordered DNA tests and found that their client could not have been the source of the semen in Ogg's body. A lower court said that Criner

BY HEART

The songs come at us first; and then the rhymed
Verses like speech that half-sings; then the tunes
Of summer evening—the train whistle's sigh
Westering, fading, as I lay in bed
Sunset still creeping past the lowered shade;
The gossip of swallows; the faint, radioed
Reed section of a dance band through an open
Window down at the far end of the street;
And then the strings of digits that we learn
To keep like bunched keys ready to unlock
All the boxes we get assigned to us
By the uncaring sheriffs of life itself.
We play by ear, but learn the words by heart;
(Visions we have by head); yet even when
The sight of the remembered page has dimmed
The jingles that we gleaned from it remain
Lodged with us, useful, sometimes, for the work
Of getting a grip on certain fragile things.
We are ourselves from birth committed to
Memory, to broad access to a past
Framing and filling any presentness
Of self that we could really call our own.
We grasp the world by ear, by heart, by head,
And keep it in a soft continuingness
That we first learned to get by soul, or something.

—*John Hollander*

should have a new trial, but Sharon Keller wrote an opinion for the Court of Criminal Appeals stating that Criner's sentence should stand. "The new evidence does not establish innocence," she wrote. Criner may not have ejaculated or he may have used a condom. Or the victim could have "had sexual relations with men other than" Criner. After all, Keller wrote, "there was testimony that the victim had had many boyfriends and that she had said that she 'loved sex.' "

Keller's reasoning in the Criner case was seen as so misguided that, in time, the district attorney, the local sheriff, and the judge in Montgomery County asked Governor Bush to pardon Criner, which Bush did, on August 15th of this year. After ten years in prison, Criner was released that day.

Judge Keller gives few interviews, particularly after a PBS "Frontline" documentary about the Criner case, in which she made several gratuitous remarks about the alleged sex life of the victim in the case. ("Well, you're not forgetting there are—you're not taking into account the fact that she was a promiscuous girl," Keller said.) The Judge had said that she would not speak to me, but I stopped by her office anyway—a grimly modern structure with a lobby adorned by thirty-four portraits of white male judges from Texas's past. Keller came right downstairs when I called.

It was a hundred and two degrees in Austin that day, but Keller was impeccably turned out in an uncreased yellow suit. She exuded Southern charm, but she has an icy grace that is in keeping with her station; it was clear that she wanted only to make small talk. She had just returned from a Mediterranean cruise with her son, a last treat before he went off to college. She mentioned that a tour guide, on learning that she was a judge, had said that there were some women judges in the region, but that they were not allowed to preside over death-penalty cases. "They don't think the women can do it," Keller said. Then she paused and added, unsmiling, "They might be surprised." ◆

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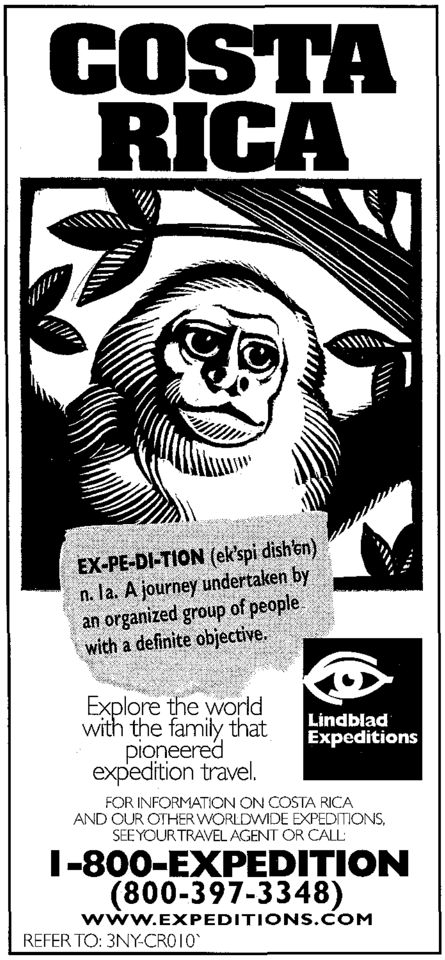
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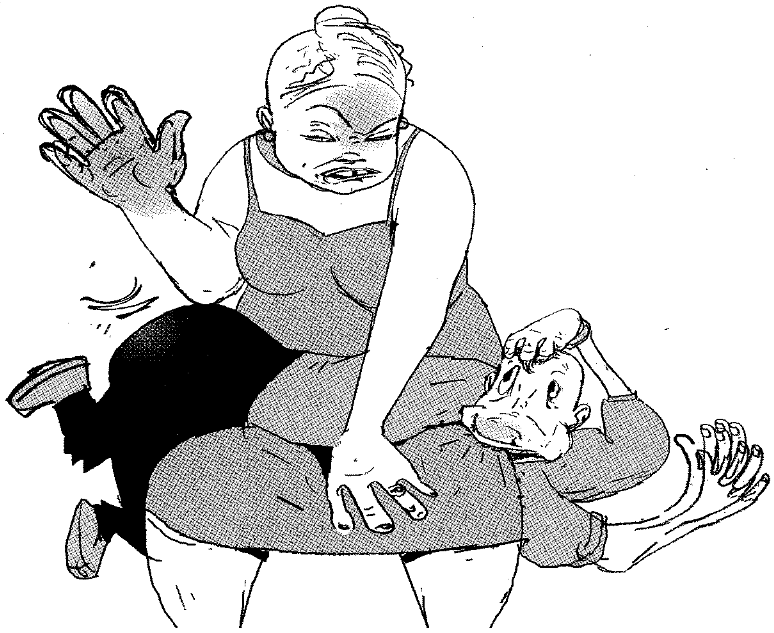
MOM V. SON

BY ANDY BOROWITZ



ISTVAN BANYAI

Saul Steinberg's mother . . . filed a lawsuit on Thursday in State Supreme Court in Manhattan, demanding that her son repay almost $5 million that she says he borrowed from her in 1997 and promised to repay on Dec. 31, 1999.—*The Times, September 9, 2000.*

Eminem met with lawyers for nearly three hours at Macomb Circuit Court Wednesday to give a video deposition in his mother's $10 million defamation lawsuit against him.—*The Detroit News, September 14, 2000.*

It's been said that you never really get over being sued by your mom. I can still remember the first time I read Mom's nine-page legal complaint. Whenever Mom called me by my full name, I knew I was in big trouble, and this was no exception: Mom was suing me for thirty million dollars.

"Mom, why are you doing this?" I asked her on the phone.

"You didn't send flowers on Mother's Day. Plus, I've never liked that woman you married. She's a tramp."

"Can't we talk about this?"

"This is a legal matter," she said frostily. "I suggest you get a lawyer." Click.

Shell-shocked, I consulted the Yellow Pages and found a law firm that specializes in defending sons who are being sued by their mothers: 1-800-MAWSUIT. Unfortunately, the lawyer I spoke to when I phoned said there were so many sons being sued by their mothers right now that the firm couldn't possibly take on any new cases. I thanked him for his time and sadly hung up the phone.

With nowhere else to turn, I called up the rapper Eminem. I had read that his mother was suing him, too, and while I didn't know him personally, I figured misery loves company.

"Marshall Mathers," said the voice at the other end of the line. I was afraid I had the wrong number, but then Mr. Mathers explained that he was in fact Eminem—a pretty clever nickname based on the two "M"s in his name.

"The only person who calls me Marshall Mathers anymore is my mom, when she's suing me," he said.

I told him I had the same problem, and he said he'd be happy to see me, as soon as he finished writing some obscene lyrics about Candice Bergen that he was working on.

When I arrived at Eminem's apartment, he gave me a friendly greeting. "Nice to meet you," he said. "And this is my friend Essiness." I turned and saw the person he was referring to: the legendary financier Saul Steinberg, who was reclining on Eminem's sofa, listening to Eminem's new Candice Bergen song on headphones. "Yo, Eminem, this tune is ill," Steinberg said, his head rocking spasmodically to the hip-hop beat.

It turned out that Steinberg had consulted Eminem a few weeks earlier when the former billionaire discovered that they were both being sued by their moms. The two men really hit it off, and now they were hanging with each other all the time: plotting legal strategy, going to clubs, and occasionally rapping together, improvising nasty, wickedly funny lyrics about their moms.

We spent the next few hours talking about our moms and their lawsuits—sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, but always listening to one another. "If I had to do it all over again, maybe I wouldn't have recorded that song where I called my mother a crazy slut," Eminem said, a hint of ruefulness in his voice.

"Dude, stop beating yourself up!" Steinberg bellowed, pounding his fist on the coffee table. "No regrets, man! Remember that. If I had to do it all over again, I'd borrow ten million from my bitch!"

Eminem looked at Steinberg, tears of gratitude welling up in his eyes. "Essiness has been great," Eminem told me. "I don't know if I could've made it through this thing without him."

These days, Eminem, Steinberg, and I are pretty much inseparable. True, we're all going through a terrible ordeal, but we're there for one another. With their love and support, I've discovered reserves of strength in myself that I didn't know I had—and, what's more, I now have a plan of action. This Mother's Day, I'm definitely sending my mother something. And it's going to be nine pages long. ♦

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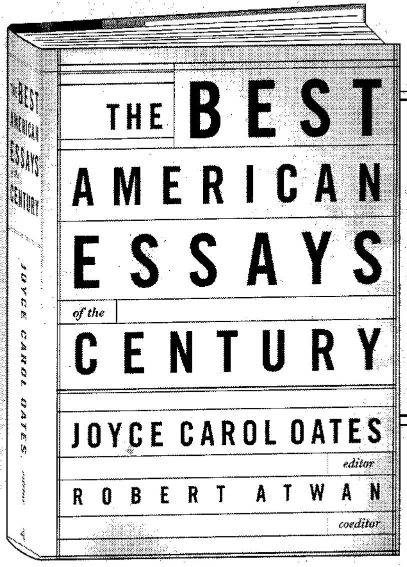

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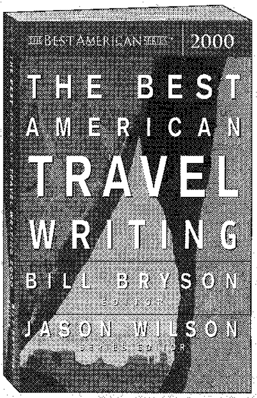
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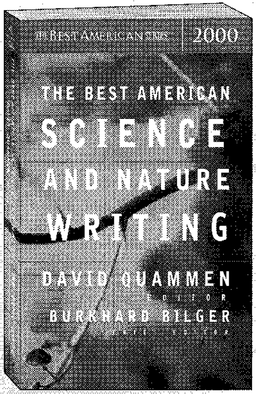
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U.S. JOURNAL

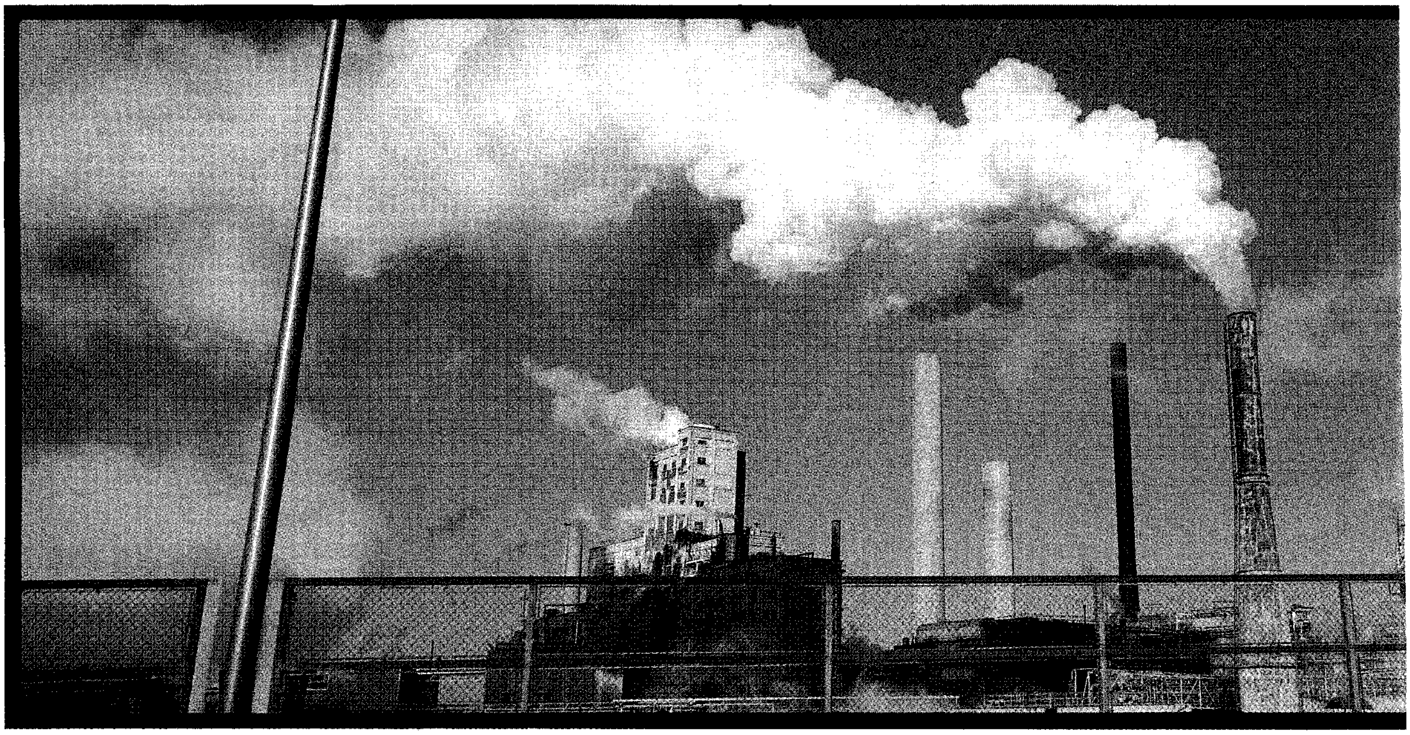
TOWN ON A STRING

After strikes, tornadoes, racial hostilities, and a tire recall, what's next?

BY MARK SINGER

DECATUR, ILLINOIS

People who live in small towns, or even in medium-sized ones, tend to be pleasantly surprised when they venture out of state and encounter big-city dwellers who can summon salient facts about the travellers' home towns. Residents of Decatur, Illinois, though, have learned not to get all that thrilled. Until not long ago, the metropolises of Springfield (the state capital) and Peoria (of the Watergate-era rhetorical question "Will it play in Peoria?") ranked well above Decatur on the Central Illinois Recognition Factor Index. That was, however, before the gap was narrowed by an accumulation of calamities and embarrassments that have put Decatur in the headlines with such disconcerting frequency that many of the natives have acquired an adaptive defensive trait along the lines of postwar German amnesia—a talent for parsing how a given set of regrettable circumstances does or does not truly qualify as a "Decatur situation." That defensiveness, it seems, is symptomatic of an unsettling knowledge, an industrial city's recognition that a willingness to work hard doesn't necessarily translate into an ability to guide one's own destiny.

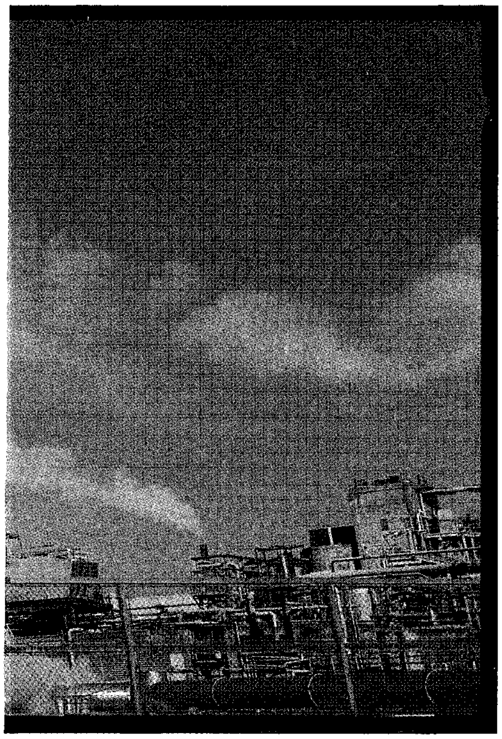


"Something negative happens, it draws attention, and Decatur always seems to come up," a local business leader said. Photograph

"So, did everyone in Decatur walk under a ladder, or what?" a reporter for the Springfield *State Journal-Register* wrote in mid-August, reviewing Decatur's checkered history and appraising an ominous development in the unfolding story about deadly Firestone tires—the ones prone to lose their treads at high speeds, usually when mounted on Ford Explorer sport-utility vehicles, too often with tragic consequences. A large proportion of those faulty tires could be traced to Decatur. Bridgestone Corporation, the Japanese conglomerate that owns Firestone, operates a dozen tire-manufacturing plants in the United States, including one in Decatur that employs twenty-one hundred people. In a city with a population of eighty-three thousand, this naturally makes Firestone not only a major employer but, potentially, a major contributor to the confusion about who, exactly, is in charge of what around here.

In Decatur last month, where I'd gone hoping to come up with a tactful way to ask people what it's like to live in a place that keeps getting socked in the eye, the first person I spoke with was Kevin Breheny, the chairman of the board of the Chamber of Commerce. Warming up, Breheny, a handsome, buttoned-down insurance broker in his mid-forties, told me, "I moved here from St. Louis twenty-one years ago. And I've developed a great sense of pride in being a Decaturan. This is an incredibly impressive city. It's a miniature Chicago. It has to deal with issues that many big cities deal with, but it's because we're such a production-oriented city. I'm amazed by what Decatur has been able to achieve over the years, and I hate to see it portrayed as it has been."

During our conversation, we touched upon several awkward but unavoidable topics: the labor troubles of the mid-nineties, when thousands of workers simultaneously manned picket lines at three factories (Firestone, the heavy-equipment manufacturer Caterpillar, and A. E. Staley, a British-owned corn processor), earning Decatur the nickname Striketown, U.S.A.; the scandal at the grain processor Archer Daniels Midland, Decatur's corporate crown jewel (which yielded a 1996 guilty plea for price-fixing violations, a hundred-million-dollar fine, and prison terms for three top executives); the racial hostilities that erupted a year ago, after the Decatur school board expelled for two years six African-American high-school students who got into a fight in the bleachers during a football game (a cause célèbre that brought the Reverend Jesse Jackson to town and pitted thousands of protest marchers against the Decatur establishment, with sideshows by white-supremacist counter-demonstrators). By the end, Breheny was taking long pauses and often rubbing his eyes, and I didn't have the heart to ask him to consider the metaphorical import of the back-to-back tornadoes that had struck Decatur on consecutive nights in 1996, or the streptococcus outbreak that took the lives of eight Decatur residents a couple of years ago, or the fact that last December Decatur lost its commercial-passenger air link to Chicago.



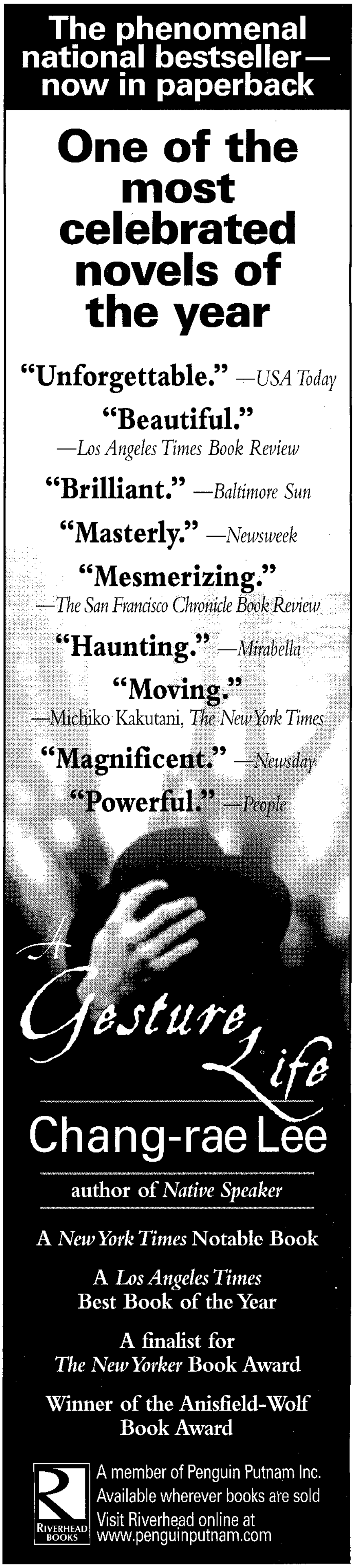
by Sylvia Plachy.

When the subject turned to Firestone, Breheny chose his words especially carefully. Yes, it was true that Firestone had begun a recall of six and a half million tires, because, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, defects in certain brands had contributed to accidents in which more than a hundred people died. And, yes, Firestone's own executives had already cited Decatur as the primary domestic source of problem tires. Congressional hearings were under way, spokespeople for Ford and Firestone were trading damning accusations, and lawsuits seeking hundreds of millions of dollars in damages had been filed. Paradoxically, the more finger-pointing there was and the more global the debacle, the readier Breheny seemed to view the whole mess with detachment.

"I don't really look at this as a Decatur situation," he said. "There's still a lot of things we don't know. It's not clear that all the tires that had problems were manufactured in Decatur. Something negative happens, it draws attention, and Decatur always seems to come up."

The same day I met with Breheny, a pair of open letters of encouragement to Firestone employees were being circulated. One was signed by the board members of the Chamber of Commerce and the local Economic Development Corporation, and the other was from Terry Howley, the mayor of Decatur, who wrote, "Your city government is proud to have the Bridgestone/Firestone plant in Decatur. . . . Keep working to produce the best quality tires available anywhere, and keep your head held high."

Heartfelt, morale-boosting sentiments conveyed not a moment too soon, because the same day, as it happened, six thousand miles from Decatur, Yoichiro Kaizaki, the chief executive of Bridgestone, gave an interview to the *Wall Street Journal.* "BRIDGESTONE MAY RESTAFF ITS U.S. UNIT" was a headline in the next day's *Journal,* accompanied by the alarming subhead "Tire Controversy Also Could Suspend Work at Decatur, Ill., Plant." If improvements needed to be made to factory equipment in Decatur, Kaizaki said, production might be interrupted temporarily. And, if tire sales declined substantially in the wake of the recall, the closing could become permanent. The day after that, the Decatur *Herald & Review* devoted almost its entire front page to the possible plant shutdown, illus-



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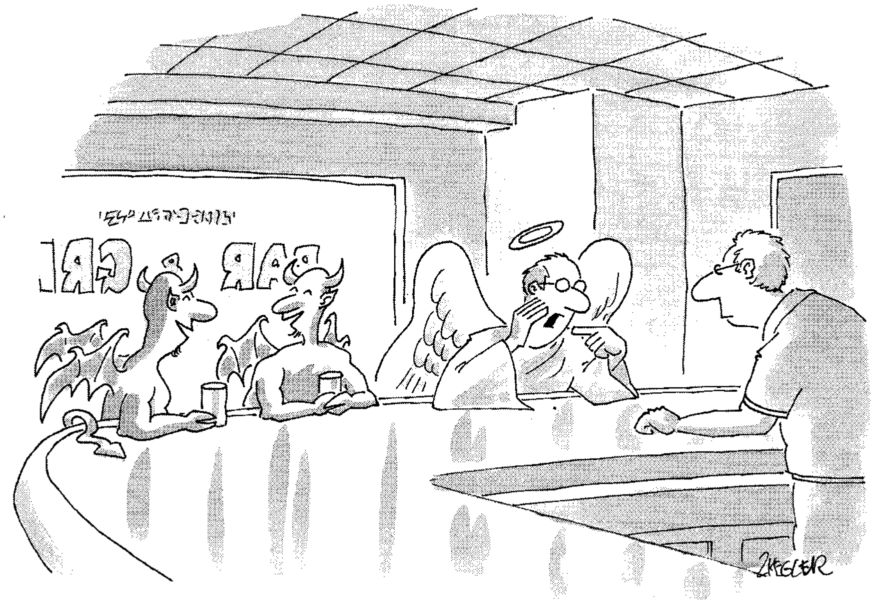


"I'll have whatever they're having."

• •

trating how abruptly a minor concern in Tokyo could become very much a Decatur situation.

Decatur, its citizens will tell you proudly, is a place where people don't just work, they work hard. Because Decatur loyalists know better than to insist that it qualifies as picturesque—sitting there pragmatically on the Illinois plains, unadorned by topographical marvels or noteworthy architectural improvements—they prefer to talk about how, as one businessman told me recently, "this city just puts its nose down and makes things, it just pumps out product." Pick up your head and you see an odd sight: fields of corn and soybeans have been planted in undeveloped tracts of heavy-industrial zones, on the east side of town. This time of year, on Indian-summer afternoons, from certain vantage points, heat waves shimmer above the corn stubble. In the background, six-story smokestacks vent white clouds that hang over sprawling edifices interlaced with rail lines, a tableau suggestive of a forbidding Soviet-style factory city.

For a town willing to apply itself so diligently, accustomed to trading aesthetics for productivity, the Firestone fiasco seems plain unfair. And, worse, it evokes a familiar sensation, the nauseating distress of being a yo-yo on a string manipulated far away by an unseen yo-yoist. For the more ironically inclined, the predicament also has the quality of a strange parable, a hideous plot turn in an old story dense with unhappy memories. The old story is the labor war that ended five years ago—the strikes at Firestone and Caterpillar, and the dispute at A. E. Staley. Staley is a homegrown Decatur business (it makes starches and sweeteners) that in 1988 was sold to the British firm Tate & Lyle (which mainly makes sugars); five years later, the new absentee owner locked out the union. At the end of the lockout, which lasted two and a half years, there were three hundred and twenty hourly jobs left—down from seven hundred and sixty. Diehard union people watched fellow-workers, neighbors, and, in some cases, relatives cross picket lines—Staley people signing on at Caterpillar and Firestone, and vice versa—and the factories kept running. When the unions and the companies finally settled, organized labor had lost across the board, at a cost that could be measured not only in dollars and undesirable new work rules but in personal bitterness as well. David Watts was the president of the Staley union and chose to retire rather than return to the factory. "When we went into this dispute, we knew we were going to get our asses kicked, but we weren't going to let Tate & Lyle do this to us silently," he told me. "The lockout pay was sixty dollars a week. Some Staley workers crossed lines as replacement workers. Although I recognized how they were driven to do what they did—they were destitute—the animosities this created among people I worked with for twenty-nine years will never go away for me."

Today, the price of the conflict seems to have risen incalculably. It's easy to imagine the plaintiff lawyers in the Firestone litigation as they polish their narratives, reciting for jurors a tale of how insufficiently trained replacement workers were present when tires were built which eventually contributed to the deaths of innocent people. Tire-making, it turns out, rather than being a straightforward mechanical task, depends greatly upon skill and judgment. "It takes two years to become a good tire builder," William Newton, a retired Firestone employee, recently told the New York *Times*. Cecil Aldridge, a current Firestone worker, agreed. "I knew there'd be some kind of problem with the tires," he said. "I just didn't know it would be this serious." As the litigation progresses, the lawyers are bound to try to establish the following links in a theory of causation: lax quality controls at the plant contributed to the tire failures, and those lapses derived from inadequate supervision and training both during and after the strike.

Last week, there was more bad news from Tokyo: layoffs of four hundred and fifty Firestone workers at the Decatur plant. Meanwhile, for as long as the plant isn't completely shut down, a number of erstwhile replacement workers, now members of United Steelworkers Local 713, will stay on the job. If in the past it felt awful to show up each day knowing that in the eyes of fellow-workers one would forever be scorned as a scab, how much worse must it be to contemplate the notion that one's hands are tainted with blood?

Perceptions of moral culpability, I discovered in Decatur, take on many different shadings. For instance, while the Staley lockout dragged on, Father Martin Mangan, who for the past ten years has been the parish priest of St. James Church, a congregation in a blue-collar neighborhood not far from downtown, decided that the company's cavalier treatment of its workers made it impossible for him to remain neutral. A pink-faced, paunchy, and cheerful man of seventy, Father Mangan preaches and practices a forthright social-gospel message. At one point during the lockout, he bought a single share of stock in Tate & Lyle and paid his own way to London to attend the annual shareholders' meeting. There, he says, "The C.E.O. of Tate & Lyle listened to what I had to say and told me, 'You're in the wrong place.' Tate & Lyle considered this a local issue. They patted me on the top of the head rather patronizingly and said, in effect, 'Father, you go take care of the spiritual needs of your people. We'll take care of the economic needs of Tate & Lyle.'"

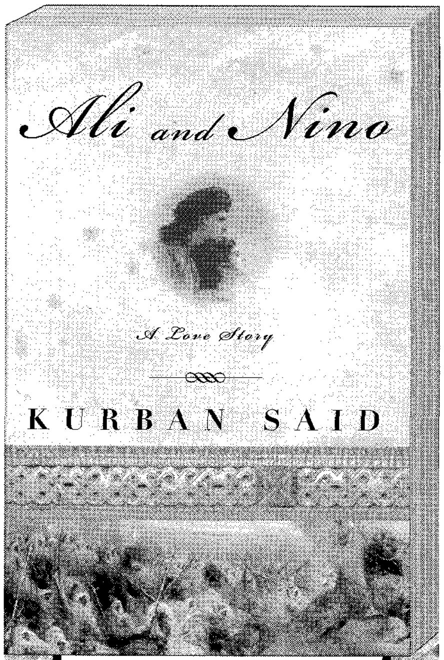
A theological sensibility isn't required to grasp how certain ramifications of Tate & Lyle's behavior extend beyond its fiduciary duties to its shareholders. At St. James, Father Mangan oversees a parochial school of a hundred and thirty children. When he talks about his commitment to the school, he says, "I came here to insure that this would be the last school that would close in Decatur"—a reference to the historical policy by default in the Decatur public schools, where the pattern has been to perform minimal maintenance until a facility no longer seems habitable and then to close it. Not long after its victory over labor, Tate & Lyle decided to challenge the valuation of its property for tax-assessment purposes, and succeeded in getting its tax bill cut in half. The consequent burden on the school system has been enormous: more than three hundred thousand dollars last year alone. At the moment, Tate & Lyle's most immediate contribution to Decatur's quality of life is a burned-broccoli aroma (though it's actually burning corn) that permeates the neighborhood near the Staley plant. Its other dubious achievement has been to inspire fellow corporate citizens to copy its tax-protest example. Earlier this month, Archer Daniels Midland, the fourteen-billion-dollar agri-empire that famously trumpets itself as "supermarket to the world," got its assessment cut by fifteen per cent. This will reduce school revenue next year by another hundred and eighty-eight thousand dollars.

"The community has a consciousness, a state of mind," Larry Haab, the retired chairman of Illinois Power, told me. "It can feel good in good times and feel worse when things aren't going so well. And now is a bad time. I hear it largely in throwaway comments: 'What bad thing is going to happen next? We're getting dumped on again.' I think the broad citizenry think it's all beyond our control."

That out-of-control phenomenon was literally exemplified by the ugly brawl a year ago at the high-school football game, an incident that was captured on videotape and repeatedly broadcast to television viewers across the country—the spectacle of a young African-American male being chased through crowded bleachers by a swarm of others, scattering hundreds of panicked spectators. Seven of the students were quickly identified, one withdrew from school, and the six others were swiftly expelled for two years. This was the maximum punishment allowed by law, a penalty the Decatur school board justified on the ground of a "zero tolerance" policy. The students' defenders argued that the punishment didn't fit the crime and that because the school board hadn't provided for alternative schooling it was in effect handing the students educational death sentences.

And then Jesse Jackson came to town, an event that "rocked the very foundation of the white community," according to Kent Phillips, a social worker and a member of the *Herald & Review* editorial board. "Traditionally, white people enjoy the positions of power and authority," Phillips continued. "And here comes a man who has international power and authority, and all of a sudden everybody closed ranks to make sure they had all their ducks in a row to fight this international figure." Upon Jackson's first official visit to Decatur, the president of the school board, Jacqueline Goetter, sounding intemperate, declared that "the expulsions stand. . . . There is nothing Reverend Jackson can say or do . . . that would make me change my mind." Eventually, a compromise was reached; the expulsions were reduced to one year and the students were placed in alternative schools. Jackson could have claimed victory as a peace broker and withdrawn from the fray. Instead, he saw an opportunity to exploit the Decatur situation in order to draw attention to a national trend toward expelling black students at a far higher rate than white ones. By refusing to leave Decatur alone, Jackson managed to make life there increasingly uncomfortable for a lot of people, black and white, who weren't feeling all that carefree to begin with. "I felt it was arrogant of the school board to take the position it did," Walt Smith, the director of the Boys & Girls Club of Decatur, who happened to have firsthand experience with

"A BLAZING MASTERPIECE"*



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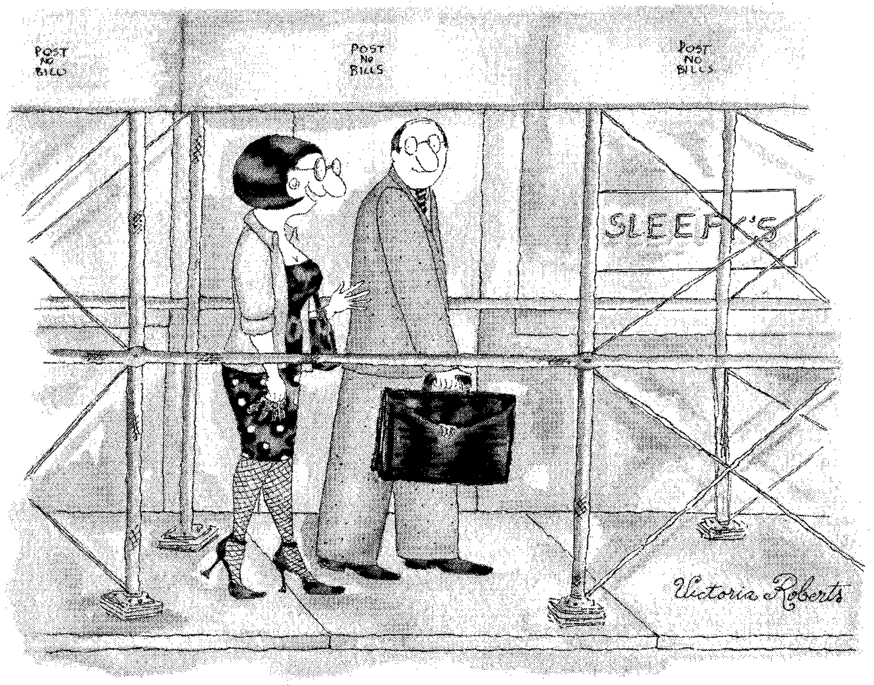
all seven students, told me. "I was equally pissed off because the Reverend Jackson rides into my community and takes it over without properly consulting certain people who reside here." It's hard to select a lowest moment in this protracted torment, but one strong contender would be a speech Jackson gave last January, in Springfield, during which he alleged the existence of a conspiracy to kick black students out of school—young people who would then be likely to wind up behind bars, thereby providing prison jobs for whites. Jackson labelled this "the Decatur syndrome."

There's nothing special about an urban school system in a funding crisis. What's unique to Decatur is that its crisis has caused so many people to question the value of a school system, period. This is evident in the attitude towards an item on the November election ballot, a referendum on whether to raise the rate on property taxes earmarked for the Decatur public schools' "education fund," which pays for teacher salaries and for student programs and services. Passage would provide an additional ten million dollars a year, roughly the projected shortfall in the current operating budget. The owner of a home valued at eighty thousand dollars—the median price in Decatur—would see his annual bill increase by three hundred and forty-eight dollars. Educators and citizens' groups have marshalled easy-to-read charts and graphs to entice voters, and they invoke the standard "cautiously optimistic" when asked to predict the outcome. No rational person, however, would dare take this sort of thing for granted; the last time voters in Decatur agreed to an education-fund tax increase, Dwight Eisenhower was running for reëlection.

Two recent unsuccessful referendum campaigns, in November, 1998, and March, 1999, sought almost sixty-five million dollars for bricks-and-mortar projects. If the current referendum also fails, one reason might be that it's not really about the schools as such but about what schools symbolize—an investment in the future. A feeling of defeat might characterize any community whose jobs are threatened; the feeling of defeat in this town—its Decatur syndrome—is a disillusion with the status quo *and* with the idea that anything better lies ahead. Why fill the revenue breach, some taxpayers say, if Archer Daniels Midland and Staley aren't willing to pay their fair share? Fed-up white voters, speaking in coded language, ask why they should support a school system in which learning gets sacrificed because too many resources are devoted to disciplinary matters? (Fifteen per cent of the Decatur population is African-American, but the figure in the public schools is almost forty-five per cent.) Many black parents, feeling disenfranchised, wonder why they should foot the bill when they don't trust the school board to take their children's interests to heart. And then there is the prospect of the Firestone plant's closing: people worried about their ability to make a mortgage payment tend to be disinclined to increase their property taxes.



"I like Al Gore just fine—if only he weren't such a constant reminder that, for me, vaudeville is dead."

On the first anniversary of the bleacher fight, the *Herald & Review* published a couple of "Where are they now?" stories, including updates on the seven young men who ignited this particular Decatur situation. Two of them, Gregory Howell, who had withdrawn from school before he could be formally expelled, and Roosevelt Fuller, were able to graduate last spring through an alternative program, and Howell has since started college. Four students reënrolled at Decatur high schools this fall. Two of the reënrollees, along with Roosevelt Fuller, have since been arrested on unrelated charges of robbing and beating an acquaintance. Another was arrested for marijuana possession and fleeing the police. The fourth, Terrence Jarrett, dropped out of school after the first few weeks. Courtney Carson, another member of the so-called Decatur Seven, was awaiting trial for felony mob action—a charge stemming from the fight—and, because he had skipped a couple of court appearances, had been jailed for several weeks pending trial.

What this "Where are they now?" account implicitly demonstrated was the odd kinship, the parallel experiences, of the Decatur Seven and the clock punchers at Firestone. For a while, even when you're scared that you might suddenly lose your job or your freedom to go to school and learn something, you get caught up following in the newspapers and on television a story that seems to be about you. Pay close attention, and soon enough it dawns on you that you're only a marginal player in a much broader narrative driven by people whose agendas don't really make allowances for the details of individual lives. One day, things quiet down enough for you to look in the mirror and to hear yourself think. And that's when you recognize what a quintessential Decatur situation you've wound up in. Regardless of what ails you or how it all got started—and despite your suspicion that it's not going to turn out very well—basically you're on your own. ♦

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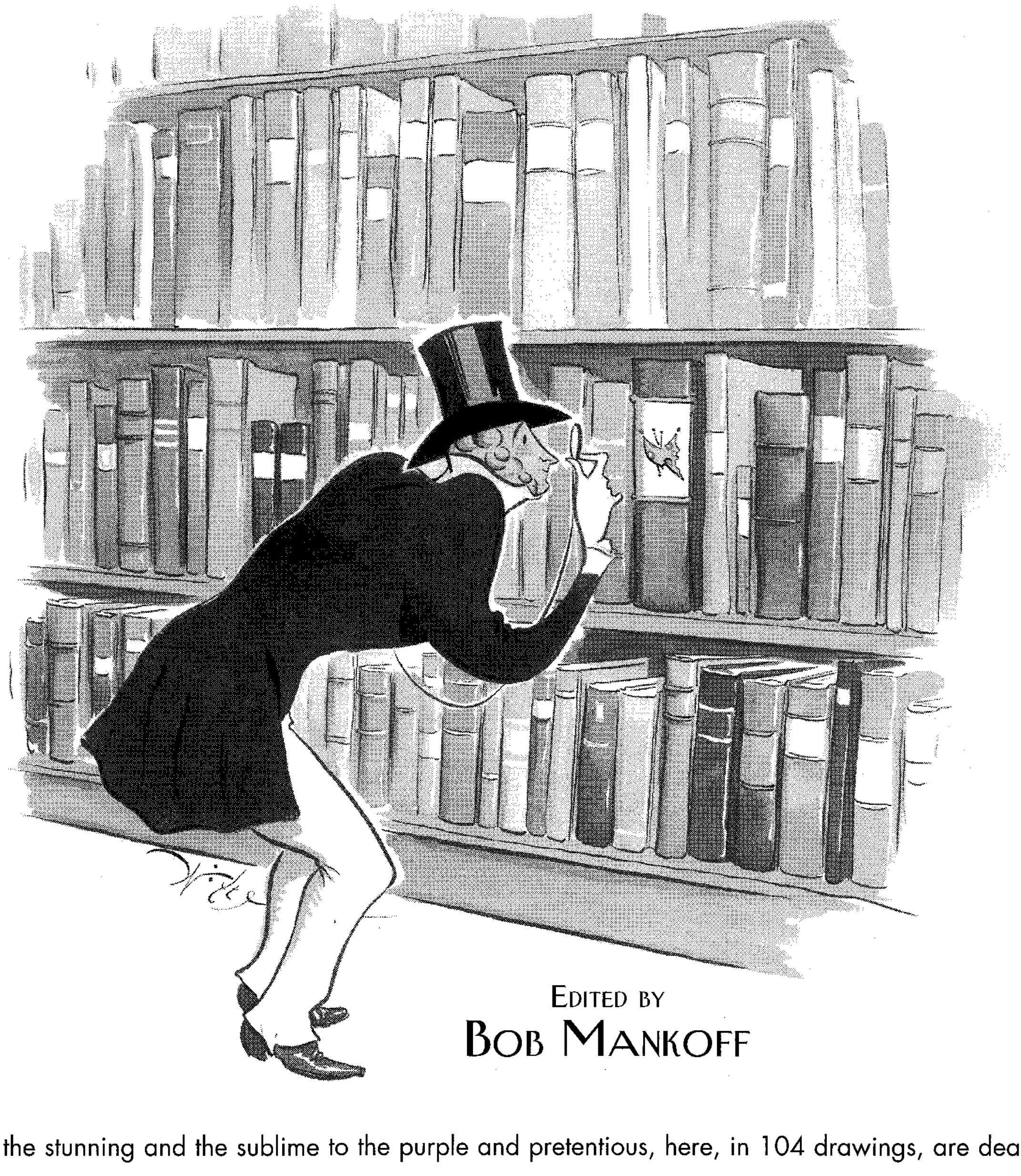

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ANNALS OF ENTERPRISE

THE PITCHMAN

Ron Popeil and the conquest of the American kitchen.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

The extraordinary story of the Ronco Showtime Rotisserie & BBQ begins with Nathan Morris, the son of the shoemaker and cantor Kidders Morris, who came over from the Old Country in the eighteen-eighties, and settled in Asbury Park, New Jersey. Nathan Morris was a pitchman. He worked the boardwalk and the five-and-dimes and county fairs up and down the Atlantic coast, selling kitchen gadgets made by Acme Metal, out of Newark. In the early forties, Nathan set up N. K. Morris Manufacturing—turning out the KwiKi-Pi and the Morris Metric Slicer—and perhaps because it was the Depression and job prospects were dim, or perhaps because Nathan Morris made such a compelling case for his new profession, one by one the members of his family followed him into the business. His sons Lester Morris and Arnold (the Knife) Morris became his pitchmen. He set up his brother-in-law Irving Rosenbloom, who was to make a fortune on Long Island in plastic goods, including a hand grater of such excellence that Nathan paid homage to it with his own Dutch Kitchen Shredder Grater. He partnered with his brother Al, whose own sons worked the boardwalk, alongside a gangly Irishman by the name of Ed McMahon. Then, one summer just before the war, Nathan took on as an apprentice his nephew Samuel Jacob Popeil. S.J., as he was known, was so inspired by his uncle Nathan that he went on to found Popeil Brothers, based in Chicago, and brought the world the Dial-O-Matic, the Chop-O-Matic, and the Veg-O-Matic. S. J. Popeil had two sons. The elder was Jerry, who died young. The younger is familiar to anyone who has ever watched an infomercial on late-night television. His name is Ron Popeil.

In the postwar years, many people made the kitchen their life's work. There were the Klinghoffers of New York, one of whom, Leon, died tragically in 1985, during the Achille Lauro incident, when he was pushed overboard in his wheelchair by Palestinian terrorists). They made the Roto-Broil 400, back in the fifties, an early rotisserie for the home, which was pitched by Lester Morris. There was Lewis Salton, who escaped the Nazis with an English stamp from his father's collection and parlayed it into an appliance factory in the Bronx. He brought the world the Salton Hotray—a sort of precursor to the microwave—and today Salton, Inc., sells the George Foreman Grill.

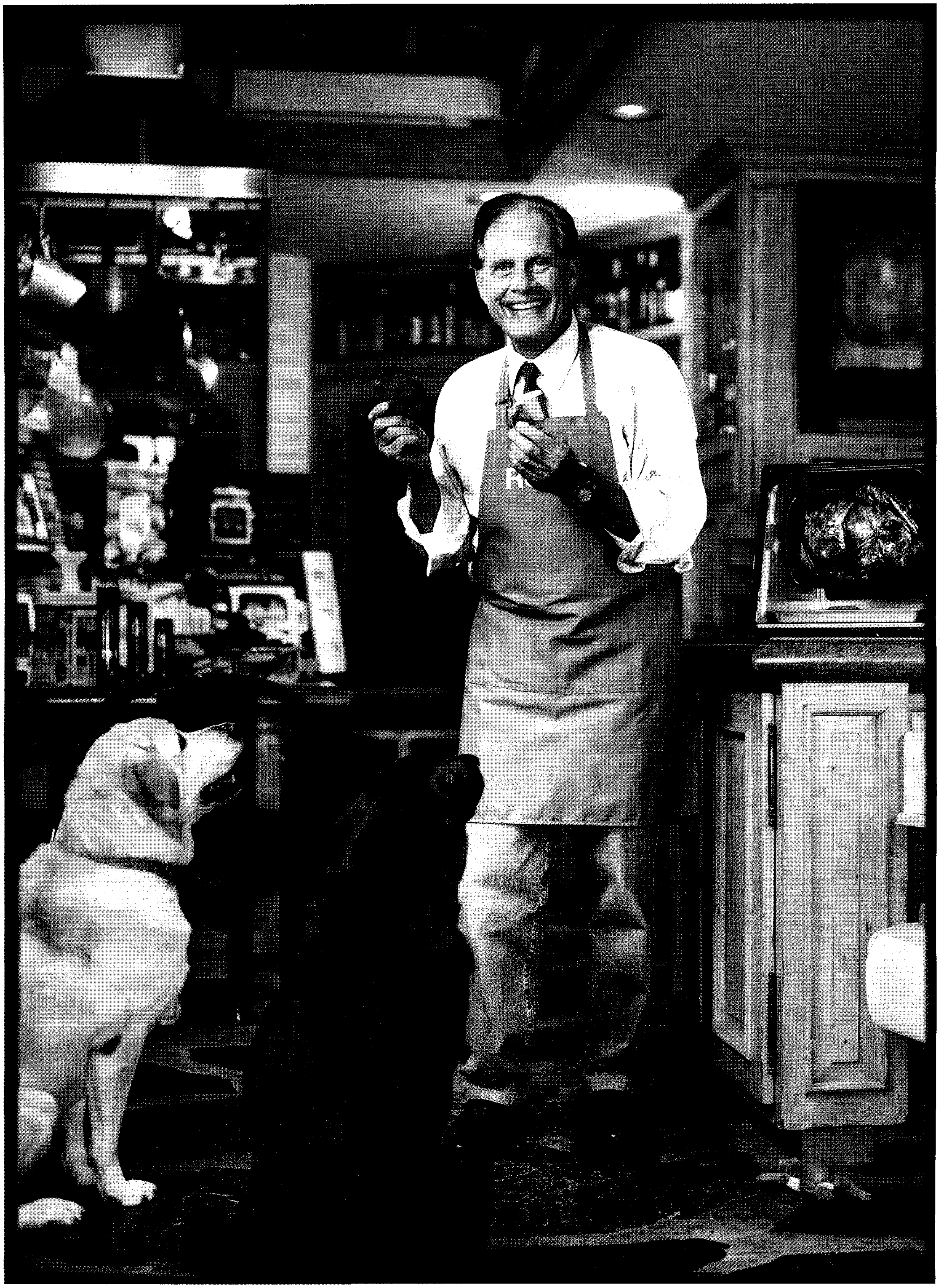
But no rival quite matched the Morris-Popeil clan. They were the first family of the American kitchen. They married beautiful women and made fortunes and stole ideas from one another and lay awake at night thinking of a way to chop an onion so that the only tears you shed were tears of joy. They believed that it was a mistake to separate product development from marketing, as most of their contemporaries did, because to them the two were indistinguishable: the object that sold best was the one that sold itself. They were spirited, brilliant men. And Ron Popeil was the most brilliant and spirited of them all. He was the family's Joseph, exiled to the wilderness by his father only to come back and make more money than the rest of the family combined. He was a pioneer in taking the secrets of the boardwalk pitchmen to the television screen. And, of all the kitchen gadgets in the Morris-Popeil pantheon, nothing has ever been quite so ingenious in its design, or so broad in its appeal, or so perfectly representative of the Morris-Popeil belief in the interrelation of the pitch and the object being pitched, as the Ronco Showtime Rotisserie & BBQ, the countertop oven that can be bought for four payments of $39.95 and may be, dollar for dollar, the finest kitchen appliance ever made.

A ROTISSERIE IS BORN

Ron Popeil is a handsome man, thick through the chest and shoulders, with a leonine head and striking, oversize features. He is in his mid-sixties, and lives in Beverly Hills, halfway up Coldwater Canyon, in a sprawling bungalow with a stand of avocado trees and a vegetable garden out back. In his habits he is, by Beverly Hills standards, old school. He carries his own bags. He has been known to eat at Denny's. He wears T-shirts and sweatpants. As often as twice a day, he can be found buying poultry or fish or meat at one of the local grocery stores—in particular, Costco, which he favors because the chickens there are ninety-nine cents a pound, as opposed to a dollar forty-nine at standard supermarkets. Whatever he buys, he brings back to his kitchen, a vast room overlooking the canyon, with an array of industrial appliances, a collection of fifteen hundred bottles of olive oil, and, in the corner, an oil painting of him, his fourth wife, Robin (a former Frederick's of Hollywood model), and their baby daughter, Contessa. On paper, Popeil owns a company called Ronco Inventions, which has two hundred employees and a couple of warehouses in Chatsworth, California, but the heart of Ronco is really Ron working out of his house, and many of the key players are really just friends of Ron's who work out of their houses, too, and who gather in Ron's kitchen when, every now and again, Ron cooks a soup and wants to talk things over.

In the last thirty years, Ron has invented a succession of kitchen gadgets, among them the Ronco Electric Food Dehydrator and the Popeil Automatic Pasta and Sausage Maker, which fea-

SABA

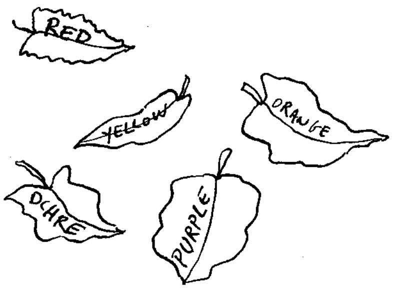


Popeil, in the kitchen where he developed the Showtime Rotisserie & BBQ. Like his forebears in the gadget trade, he understands that the making and the marketing of his devices are inseparable. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

tured a thrust bearing made of the same material used in bulletproof glass. He works steadily, guided by flashes of inspiration. This past August, for instance, he suddenly realized what product should follow the Showtime Rotisserie. He and his right-hand man, Alan Backus, had been working on a bread-and-batter machine, which would take up to ten pounds of chicken wings or scallops or shrimp or fish fillets and do all the work—combining the eggs, the flour, the breadcrumbs—in a few minutes, without dirtying either the cook's hands or the machine. "Alan goes to Korea, where we have some big orders coming through," Ron explained recently over lunch—a hamburger, medium-well, with fries—in the V.I.P. booth by the door in the Polo Lounge, at the Beverly Hills Hotel. "I call Alan on the phone. I wake him up. It was two in the morning there. And these are my exact words: 'Stop. Do not pursue the bread-and-batter machine. I will pick it up later. This other project needs to come first.'" The other project, his inspiration, was a device capable of smoking meats indoors without creating odors that can suffuse the air and permeate furniture. Ron had a version of the indoor smoker on his porch—"a Rube Goldberg kind of thing" that he'd worked on a year earlier—and, on a whim, he cooked a chicken in it. "That chicken was so good that I said to myself"—and with his left hand Ron began to pound on the table—"This is the best chicken sandwich I have ever had in my life." He turned to me: "How many times have you had a smoked-turkey sandwich? Maybe you have a smoked-turkey or a smoked-chicken sandwich once every six months. Once! How many times have you had smoked salmon? Aah. More. I'm going to say you come across smoked salmon as an hors d'oeuvre or an entrée once every three months. Baby-back ribs? Depends on which restaurant you order ribs at. Smoked sausage, same thing. You touch on smoked food"—he leaned in and poked my arm for emphasis—"but I know one thing, Malcolm. *You don't have a smoker.*"

The idea for the Showtime came about in the same way. Ron was at Costco about four years ago when he suddenly realized that there was a long line of customers waiting to buy chickens from the in-store rotisserie ovens. They touched on rotisserie chicken, but Ron knew one thing: they did not have a rotisserie oven. Ron went home and called Backus. Together, they bought a glass aquarium, a motor, a heating element, a spit rod, and a handful of other spare parts, and began tinkering. Ron wanted something big enough for a fifteen-pound turkey but small enough to fit into the space between the base of an average kitchen cupboard and the countertop. He didn't want a thermostat, because thermostats break, and the constant clicking on and off of the heat prevents the even, crispy browning that he felt was essential. And the spit rod had to rotate on the horizontal axis, not the vertical axis, because if you cooked a chicken or a side of beef on the vertical axis the top would dry out and the juices would drain to the bottom. Roderick Dorman, Ron's patent attorney, says that when he went over to Coldwater Canyon he often saw five or six prototypes on the kitchen counter, lined up in a row. Ron would have a chicken in each of them, so that he could compare the consistency of the flesh and the browning of the skin, and wonder if, say, there was a way to rotate a shish kebab as it approached the heating element so that the inner side of the kebab would get as brown as the outer part. By the time Ron finished, the Showtime prompted no fewer than two dozen patent applications. It was equipped with the most powerful motor in its class. It had a drip tray coated with a non-stick ceramic, which was easily cleaned, and the oven would still work even after it had been dropped on a concrete or stone surface ten times in succession, from a distance of three feet. To Ron, there was no question that it made the best chicken he had ever had in his life.

It was then that Ron filmed a television infomercial for the Showtime, twenty-eight minutes and thirty seconds in length. It was shot live before a studio audience, and aired for the first time on August 8, 1998. It has run ever since, often in the wee hours of the morning, or on obscure cable stations, alongside the get-rich schemes and the "Three's Company" reruns. The response to it has been such that within the next three years total sales of the Showtime should exceed a billion dollars. Ron Popeil didn't use a single focus group. He had no market researchers, R. & D. teams, public-relations advisers, Madison Avenue advertising companies, or business consultants. He did what the Morrises and the Popeils had been doing for most of the century, and what all the experts said couldn't be done in the modern economy. He dreamed up something new in his kitchen and went out and pitched it himself.



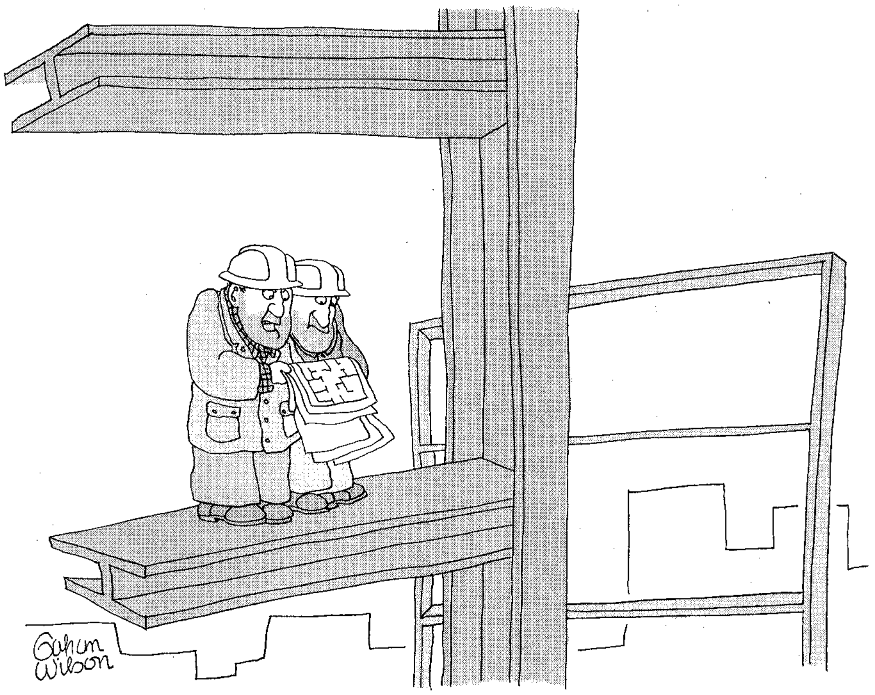
PITCHMEN

Nathan Morris, Ron Popeil's great-uncle, looked a lot like Cary Grant. He wore a straw boater. He played the ukulele, drove a convertible, and composed melodies for the piano. He ran his business out of a low-slung, white-washed building on Ridge Avenue, near Asbury Park, with a little annex in the back where he did pioneering work with Teflon. He had certain eccentricities, such as a phobia he developed about travelling beyond Asbury Park without the presence of a doctor. He feuded with his brother Al, who subsequently left in a huff for Atlantic City, and then with his nephew S. J. Popeil, whom Nathan considered insufficiently grateful for the start he had given him in the kitchen-gadget business. That second feud led to a climactic legal showdown over S. J. Popeil's Chop-O-Matic, a food preparer with a pleated, W-shaped blade rotated by a special clutch mechanism. The Chop-O-Matic was ideal for making coleslaw and chopped liver, and when Morris introduced a strikingly similar product, called the Roto-Chop, S. J. Popeil sued his uncle for patent infringement. (As it happened, the Chop-O-Matic itself seemed to have been inspired by the Blitzhacker, from Switzerland, and S. J. later lost a patent judgment to the Swiss.)

The two squared off in Trenton, in May of 1958, in a courtroom jammed with Morrises and Popeils. When the trial opened, Nathan Morris was on the stand, being cross-examined by his nephew's attorneys, who were out to show him that he was no more than a huckster and a copycat. At a key point in the questioning, the judge suddenly burst in. "He took the index finger of his right hand and he pointed it at Morris," Jack Dominik, Popeil's longtime patent lawyer, recalls, "and as long as I live I will never forget what he said. 'I know you! You're a pitchman! I've seen you on the boardwalk!' And Morris pointed his index finger back at the judge and shouted, 'No! I'm a manufacturer. I'm a dignified manufacturer, and I work with the most eminent of counsel!' " (Nathan Morris, according to Dominik, was the kind of man who referred to everyone he worked with as eminent.) "At that moment," Dominik goes on, "Uncle Nat's face was getting red and the judge's was getting redder, so a recess was called." What happened later that day is best described in Dominik's unpublished manuscript, "The Inventions of Samuel Joseph Popeil by Jack E. Dominik—His Patent Lawyer." Nathan Morris had a sudden heart attack, and S.J. was guilt-stricken. "Sobbing ensued," Dominik writes. "Remorse set in. The next day, the case was settled. Thereafter, Uncle Nat's recovery from his previous day's heart attack was nothing short of a miracle."

Nathan Morris was a performer, like so many of his relatives, and pitching was, first and foremost, a performance. It's said that Nathan's nephew Archie (the Pitchman's Pitchman) Morris once sold, over a long afternoon, gadget after gadget to a well-dressed man. At the end of the day, Archie watched the man walk away, stop and peer into his bag, and then dump the whole lot into a nearby garbage can. The Morrises were that good. "My cousins could sell you an empty box," Ron says.

The last of the Morrises to be active in the pitching business is Arnold (the Knife) Morris, so named because of his extraordinary skill with the Sharpcut, the forerunner of the Ginsu. He is in his early seventies, a cheerful, impish man with a round face and a few wisps of white hair, and a trademark move whereby, after cutting a tomato into neat, regular slices, he deftly lines the pieces up in an even row against the flat edge of the blade. Today, he lives in Ocean Township, a few miles from Asbury Park, with Phyllis, his wife of twenty-nine years, whom he refers to (with the same irresistible conviction that he might use to describe, say, the Feather Touch Knife) as "the prettiest girl in Asbury Park." One morning recently, he sat in his study and launched into a pitch for the Dial-O-Matic, a slicer produced by S. J. Popeil some forty years ago.



"Don't these fools realize they're violating every principle of feng-shui?"

"Come on over, folks. I'm going to show you the most amazing slicing machine you have ever seen in your life," he began. Phyllis, sitting nearby, beamed with pride. He picked up a package of barbecue spices, which Ron Popeil sells alongside his Showtime Rotisserie, and used it as a prop. "Take a look at this!" He held it in the air as if he were holding up a Tiffany vase. He talked about the machine's prowess at cutting potatoes, then onions, then tomatoes. His voice, a marvellous instrument inflected with the rhythms of the Jersey Shore, took on a singsong quality: "How many cut tomatoes like this? You stab it. You jab it. The juices run down your elbow. With the Dial-O-Matic, you do it a little differently. You put it in the machine and you wiggle"—he mimed fixing the tomato to the bed of the machine. "The tomato! Lady! The tomato! The more you wiggle, the more you get. The tomato! Lady! Every slice comes out perfectly, not a seed out of place. But the thing I love my Dial-O-Matic for is coleslaw. My mother-in-law used to take her cabbage and do this." He made a series of wild stabs at an imaginary cabbage. "I thought she was going to commit suicide. Oh, boy, did I pray—that she wouldn't slip! Don't get me wrong. I love my mother-in-law. It's her daughter I can't figure out. You take the cabbage. Cut it in half. Coleslaw, hot slaw. Pot slaw. Liberty slaw. It comes out like shredded wheat . . ."

It was a vaudeville monologue, except that Arnold wasn't merely entertaining; he was selling. "You can take a pitchman and make a great actor out of him, but you cannot take an actor and always make a great pitchman out of him," he says. The pitchman must make you applaud *and* take out your money. He must be able to execute what in pitchman's parlance is called "the turn"—the perilous, crucial moment where he goes from entertainer to businessman. If, out of a crowd of fifty, twenty-five people come forward to buy, the true pitchman sells to only twenty of them. To the remaining five, he says, "Wait! There's something else I want to show you!" Then he starts his pitch again, with slight variations, and the remaining four or five become the inner core of the next crowd, hemmed in by the people around them, and so eager to pay their money and be on their way that they start the selling frenzy all over again. The turn requires the management of expectation. That's why Arnold always kept a pineapple tantalizingly perched on his stand. "For forty years, I've been promising to show people how to cut the pineapple, and I've never cut it once," he says. "It got to the point where a pitchman friend of mine went out and bought himself a plastic pineapple. Why would you cut the pineapple? It cost a couple bucks. And if you cut it they'd leave." Arnold says that he once hired some guys to pitch a vegetable slicer for him at a fair in Danbury, Connecticut, and became so annoyed at their lackadaisical attitude that he took over the demonstration himself. They were, he says, waiting for him to fail: he had never worked that particular slicer before and, sure enough, he was massacring the vegetables. Still, in a single pitch he took in two hundred dollars. "Their eyes popped out of their heads," Arnold recalls. "They said, 'We don't understand it. You don't even know how to work the damn machine.' I said, 'But I know how to do one thing better than you.' They said, 'What's that?' I said, '*I know how to ask for the money.*' And that's the secret to the whole damn business."

Ron Popeil started pitching his father's kitchen gadgets at the Maxwell Street flea market in Chicago, in the mid-fifties. He was thirteen. Every morning, he would arrive at the market at five and prepare fifty pounds each of onions, cabbages, and carrots, and a hundred pounds of potatoes. He sold from six in the morning until four in the afternoon, bringing in as much as five hundred dollars a day. In his late teens, he started doing the state- and county-fair circuit, and then he scored a prime spot in the Woolworth's at State and Washington, in the Loop, which at the time was the top-grossing Woolworth's store in the country. He was making more than the manager of the store, selling the Chop-O-Matic and the Dial-O-Matic. He dined at the Pump Room and wore a Rolex and rented hundred-and-fifty-dollar-a-night hotel suites. In pictures from the period, he is beautiful, with thick dark hair and blue-green eyes and sensuous lips, and, several years later, when he moved his office to 919 Michigan Avenue, he was called the Paul Newman of the Playboy Building. Mel Korey, a friend of Ron's from college and his first business partner, remembers the time he went to see Ron pitch the Chop-O-Matic at the State Street Woolworth's. "He was mesmerizing," Korey says. "There were secretaries who would take their lunch break at Woolworth's to watch him because he was so good-looking. He would go into the turn, and people would just come running." Several years ago, Ron's friend Steve Wynn, the founder of the Mirage resorts, went to visit Michael Milken in prison. They were near a television, and happened to catch one of Ron's infomercials just as he was doing the countdown, a routine taken straight from the boardwalk, where he says, "You're not going to spend two hundred dollars, not a hundred and eighty dollars, not one-seventy, not one-sixty . . ." It's a standard pitchman's gimmick: it sounds dramatic only because the starting price is set way up high. But something about the way Ron did it was irresistible. As he got lower and lower, Wynn and Milken—who probably know as much about profit margins as anyone in America—cried out in unison, "Stop, Ron! Stop!"

Was Ron the best? The only attempt to settle the question definitively was made some forty years ago, when Ron and Arnold were working a knife set at the Eastern States Exposition, in West Springfield, Massachusetts. A third man, Frosty Wishon, who was a legend in his own right, was there, too. "Frosty was a well-dressed, articulate individual and a good salesman," Ron says. "But he thought he was the best. So I said, 'Well, guys, we've got a ten-day show, eleven, maybe twelve hours a day. We'll each do a rotation, and we'll compare how much we sell." In Morris-Popeil lore, this is known as "the shoot-out," and no one has ever forgotten the outcome. Ron beat Arnold, but only by a whisker—no more than a few hundred dollars. Frosty Wishon, meanwhile, sold only half as much as either of his rivals. "You have no idea the pressure Frosty was under," Ron continues. "He came up to me at the end of the show and said, 'Ron, I will never work with you again as long as I live.' "

No doubt Frosty Wishon was a charming and persuasive person, but he assumed that this was enough—that the rules of pitching were the same as the rules of celebrity endorsement. When Michael Jordan pitches McDonald's hamburgers, Michael Jordan is the star. But when Ron Popeil or Arnold Morris pitched, say, the Chop-O-Matic, his gift was to make the Chop-O-Matic the star. It was, after all, an innovation. It represented a different way of dicing onions and chopping liver: it required consumers to rethink the way they went about their business in the kitchen. Like most great innovations, it was disruptive. And how do you persuade people to disrupt their lives? Not merely by ingratiation or sincerity, and not by being famous or beautiful. You have to explain the invention to customers—not once or twice but three or four times, with a different twist each time. You have to show them exactly how it works and why it works, and make them follow your hands as you chop liver with it, and then tell them precisely how it fits into their routine, and, finally, sell them on the paradoxical fact that, revolutionary as the gadget is, it's not at all hard to use.

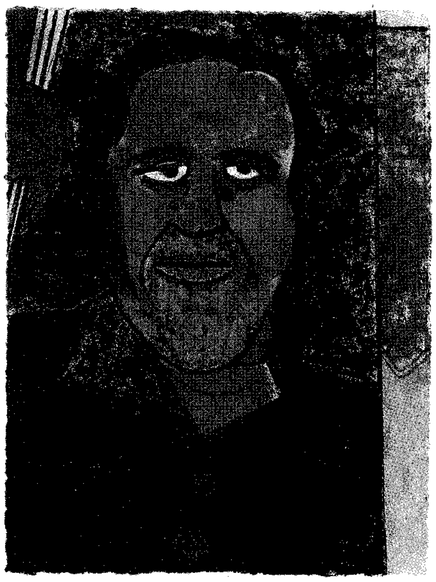
Thirty years ago, the videocassette recorder came on the market, and it was a disruptive product, too: it was supposed to make it possible to tape a television show so that no one would ever again be chained to the prime-time schedule. Yet, as ubiquitous as the VCR became, it was seldom put to that purpose. That's because the VCR was never pitched: no one ever explained the gadget to American consumers—not once or twice but three or four times—and no one showed them exactly how it worked or how it would fit into their routine, and no pair of hands guided them through every step of the process. All the VCR-makers did was hand over the box with a smile and a pat on the back, tossing in an instruction manual for good measure. Any pitchman could have told you that wasn't going to do it.

Once, when I was over at Ron's house in Coldwater Canyon, sitting on one of the high stools in his kitchen, he showed me what real pitching is all about. He was talking about how he had just had dinner with the actor Ron Silver, who is playing Ron's friend Robert Shapiro in a new movie about the O. J. Simpson trial. "They shave the back of Ron Silver's head so that he's got a bald spot, because, you know, Bob Shapiro's got a bald spot back there, too," Ron said. "So I say to him, 'You've gotta get GLH.' " GLH, one of Ron's earlier products, is an aerosol spray designed to thicken the hair and cover up bald spots. "I told him, 'It will make you look good. When you've got to do the scene, you shampoo it out.' "

At this point, the average salesman would have stopped. The story was an aside, no more. We had been discussing the Showtime Rotisserie, and on the counter behind us was a Showtime cooking a chicken and next to it a Showtime cooking baby-back ribs, and on the table in front of him Ron's pasta maker was working, and he was frying some garlic so that we could have a little lunch. But now that he had told me about GLH it was unthinkable that he would not also show me its wonders. He walked quickly over to a table at the other side of the room, talking as he went. "People always ask me, 'Ron, where did you get that name GLH?' I made it up. Great-Looking Hair." He picked up a can. "We make it in nine different colors. This is silver-black." He picked up a hand mirror and angled it above his head so that he could see his bald spot. "Now, the first thing I'll do is spray it where I don't need it." He shook the can and began spraying the crown of his head, talking all the while. "Then I'll go to the area itself." He pointed to his bald spot. "Right here. O.K. Now I'll let that dry. Brushing is fifty per cent of the way it's going to look." He began brushing vigorously, and suddenly Ron Popeil had what looked like a complete head of hair. "Wow," I said. Ron glowed. "And you tell me 'Wow.' That's what everyone says. 'Wow.' That's what people say who use it. 'Wow.' If you go outside"—he grabbed me by the arm and pulled me out onto the deck—"if you are in bright sunlight or daylight, you cannot tell that I have a big bald spot in the back of my head. It really looks like hair, but it's not hair. It's quite a product. It's incredible. Any shampoo will take it out. You know who would be a great candidate for this? Al Gore. You want to see how it feels?" Ron inclined the back of his head toward me. I had said, "Wow," and had looked at his hair inside and

RICHARD MERKIN

TAKES



Mingus asked the waitress for a glass of water. She was young and blond. "Say, you my same waitress? It's so dark in here you look like you keep changing." Mingus leaned back and smiled his beautiful smile.

"I'm your waitress," she said, putting a hand lightly on his left arm. "Are you Jaki Byard?"

"Jaki Byard? Jaki Byard? He's my piano player. He's a superstar now. I'm glad you my same waitress. Now, bring me that glass of water, please. . . . Then I got hold of Nel King, who wrote a movie I was in, and she put the book in shape. It took her a year and a half. A whole lot of stuff has been left out—stuff about blacks wearing Afros because they're afraid not to, and skin-lighteners, and my wife, Celia. There was a lot about her in there, but she didn't want to be in the book, so I left her out. I wrote it a-b-c-d-e-f-g-h at first, but then I mixed up the chronology and some of the locations. Like that party when I first came to New York around 1950. It didn't take place at any apartment in the East Seventies but over at the old Bandbox, next to Birdland. The critics were there, and they didn't stop talking once. They kept right on even when Art Tatum and Charlie Parker sat in together for maybe the only time in their lives. It was the most fantastic music I ever heard. Tatum didn't let up in either hand for a second—*whoosh-hum*, *whoosh-hum* in the left, and *aaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrhhhhhhheeeeee* in the right—and neither did Parker, and to this day I don't know what they were doing."

—*Whitney Balliett*
A Reporter at Large, May 29, 1971

outside, but the pitchman in Ron Popeil wasn't satisfied. I had to feel the back of his head. I did. It felt just like real hair.

THE TINKERER

Ron Popeil inherited more than the pitching tradition of Nathan Morris. He was very much the son of S. J. Popeil, and that fact, too, goes a long way toward explaining the success of the Showtime Rotisserie. S.J. had a ten-room apartment high in the Drake Towers, near the top of Chicago's Magnificent Mile. He had a chauffeured Cadillac limousine with a car phone, a rarity in those days, which he delighted in showing off (as in "I'm calling you from the car"). He wore three-piece suits and loved to play the piano. He smoked cigars and scowled a lot and made funny little grunting noises as he talked. He kept his money in T-bills. His philosophy was expressed in a series of epigrams: To his attorney, "If they push you far enough, sue"; to his son, "It's not how much you spend, it's how much you make." And, to a designer who expressed doubts about the utility of one of his greatest hits, the Pocket Fisherman, "It's not for using; it's for giving." In 1974, S.J.'s second wife, Eloise, decided to have him killed, so she hired two hit men—one of whom, aptly, went by the name of Mr. Peeler. At the time, she was living at the Popeil estate in Newport Beach with her two daughters and her boyfriend, a thirty-seven-year-old machinist. When, at Eloise's trial, S.J. was questioned about the machinist, he replied, "I was kind of happy to have him take her off my hands." That was vintage S.J. But eleven months later, after Eloise got out of prison, S.J. married her again. That was vintage S.J., too. As a former colleague of his puts it, "He was a strange bird."

S. J. Popeil was a tinkerer. In the middle of the night, he would wake up and make frantic sketches on a pad he kept on his bedside table. He would disappear into his kitchen for hours and make a huge mess, and come out with a faraway look on his face. He loved standing behind his machinists, peering over their shoulders while they were assembling one of his prototypes. In the late forties and early fifties, he worked almost exclusively in plastic, reinterpreting kitchen basics with a subtle, modernist flair. "Popeil Brothers made these beautiful plastic flour sifters," Tim Samuelson, a curator at the Chicago Historical Society and a leading authority on the Popeil legacy, says. "They would use contrasting colors, or a combination of opaque plastic with a translucent swirl plastic." Samuelson became fascinated with all things Popeil after he acquired an original Popeil Brothers doughnut maker, in red-and-white plastic, which he felt "had beautiful lines"; to this day, in the kitchen of his Hyde Park high-rise, he uses the Chop-O-Matic in the preparation of salad ingredients. "There was always a little twist to what he did," Samuelson goes on. "Take the Popeil automatic egg turner. It looks like a regular spatula, but if you squeeze the handle the blade turns just enough to flip a fried egg."

Walter Herbst, a designer whose firm worked with Popeil Brothers for many years, says that S.J.'s modus operandi was to "come up with a holistic theme. He'd arrive in the morning with it. It would be something like"—Herbst assumes S.J.'s gruff voice—" 'We need a better way to shred cabbage.' It was a passion, an absolute goddam passion. One morning, he must have been eating grapefruit, because he comes to work and calls me and says, 'We need a better way to cut grapefruit!' " The idea they came up with was a double-bladed paring knife, with the blades separated by a fraction of an inch so that both sides of the grapefruit membrane could be cut simultaneously. "There was a little grocery store a few blocks away," Herbst says. "So S.J. sends the chauffeur out for grapefruit. How many? Six. Well, over the period of a couple of weeks, six turns to twelve and twelve turns to twenty, until we were cutting thirty to forty grapefruits a day. I don't know if that little grocery store ever knew what happened."

S. J. Popeil's finest invention was undoubtedly the Veg-O-Matic, which came on the market in 1960 and was essentially a food processor, a Cuisinart without the motor. The heart of the gadget was a series of slender, sharp blades strung like guitar strings across two Teflon-coated metal rings, which were made in Woodstock, Illinois, from 364 Alcoa, a special grade of aluminum. When the rings were aligned on top of each other so that the blades ran parallel, a potato or an onion pushed through would come out in perfect slices. If the top ring was rotated, the blades formed a crosshatch, and a potato or an onion pushed through would come out diced. The rings were housed in a handsome plastic assembly, with a plunger to push the vegetables through the blades. Technically, the Veg-O-Matic was a triumph: the method of creating blades strong enough to withstand the assault of vegetables received a U.S. patent. But from

"It's the porch plants—can they come in?"

a marketing perspective it posed a problem. S.J.'s products had hitherto been sold by pitchmen armed with a mound of vegetables meant to carry them through a day's worth of demonstrations. But the Veg-O-Matic was *too* good. In a single minute, according to the calculations of Popeil Brothers, it could produce a hundred and twenty egg wedges, three hundred cucumber slices, eleven hundred and fifty potato shoestrings, or three thousand onion dices. It could go through what used to be a day's worth of vegetables in a matter of minutes. The pitchman could no longer afford to pitch to just a hundred people at a time; he had to pitch to a hundred thousand. The Veg-O-Matic needed to be sold on television, and one of the very first pitchmen to grasp this fact was Ron Popeil.

In the summer of 1964, just after the Veg-O-Matic was introduced, Mel Korey joined forces with Ron Popeil in a company called Ronco. They shot a commercial for the Veg-O-Matic for five hundred dollars, a straightforward pitch shrunk to two minutes, and set out from Chicago for the surrounding towns of the Midwest. They cold-called local department stores and persuaded them to carry the Veg-O-Matic on guaranteed sale, which meant that whatever the stores didn't sell could be returned. Then they visited the local television station and bought a two- or three-week run of the cheapest airtime they could find, praying that it would be enough to drive traffic to the store. "We got Veg-O-Matics wholesale for $3.42," Korey says. "They retailed for $9.95, and we sold them to the stores for $7.46, which meant that we had four dollars to play with. If I spent a hundred dollars on television, I had to sell twenty-five Veg-O-Matics to break even." It was clear, in those days, that you could use television to sell kitchen products if you were Procter & Gamble. It wasn't so clear that this would work if you were Mel Korey and Ron Popeil, two pitchmen barely out of their teens selling a combination slicer-dicer that no one had ever heard of. They were taking a wild gamble, and, to their amazement, it paid off. "They had a store in Butte, Montana—Hennessy's," Korey goes on, thinking back to those first improbable years. "Back then, people there were still wearing peacoats. The city was mostly bars. It had just a few three-story buildings. There were twenty-seven thousand people, and one TV station. I had the Veg-O-Matic, and I go to the store, and they said, 'We'll take a case. We don't have a lot of traffic here.' I go to the TV station and the place is a dump. The only salesperson was going blind and deaf. So I do a schedule. For five weeks, I spend three hundred and fifty dollars. I figure if I sell a hundred and seventy-four machines—six cases—I'm happy. I go back to Chicago, and I walk into the office one morning and the phone is ringing. They said, 'We sold out. You've got to fly us another six cases of Veg-O-Matics.' The next week, on Monday, the phone rings. It's Butte again: 'We've got a hundred and fifty oversold.' I fly him another six cases. Every few days after that, whenever the phone rang we'd look at each other and say, 'Butte, Montana.' " Even today, thirty years later, Korey can scarcely believe it. "How many homes in total in that town? Maybe several thousand? We ended up selling two thousand five hundred Veg-O-Matics in five weeks!"

Why did the Veg-O-Matic sell so well? Doubtless, Americans were eager for a better way of slicing vegetables. But it was more than that: the Veg-O-Matic represented a perfect marriage between the medium (television) and the message (the gadget). The Veg-O-Matic was, in the relevant sense, utterly transparent. You took the potato and you pushed it through the Teflon-coated rings and—voilà!—you had French fries. There were no buttons being pressed, no hidden and intimidating gears: you could show-and-tell the Veg-O-Matic in a two-minute spot and allay everyone's fears about a daunting new technology. More specifically, you could train the camera on the machine and compel viewers to pay total attention to the product you were selling. TV allowed you to do even more effectively what the best pitchmen strove to do in live demonstrations—make the product the star.

This was a lesson Ron Popeil never forgot. In his infomercial for the Showtime Rotisserie, he opens not with himself but with a series of shots of meat and poultry, glistening almost obscenely as they rotate in the Showtime. A voice-over describes each shot: a "delicious six-pound chicken," a "succulent whole duckling," a "mouthwatering pork-loin roast . . ." Only then do we meet Ron, in a sports coat and jeans. He explains the problems of conventional barbecues, how messy and unpleasant they are. He bangs a hammer against the door of the Showtime, to demonstrate its strength. He deftly trusses a chicken, impales it on the patented two-pronged Showtime spit rod, and puts it into the oven. Then he repeats the process with a pair of chickens, salmon steaks garnished with lemon and dill, and a rib roast. All the time, the camera is on his hands, which are in constant motion, manipulating the Showtime apparatus gracefully, with his calming voice leading viewers through every step: "All I'm going to do here is slide it through like this. It goes in very easily. I'll match it up over here. What I'd like to do is take some herbs and spices here. All I'll do is slide it back. Raise up my glass door here. I'll turn it to a little over an hour. . . . Just set it and forget it."

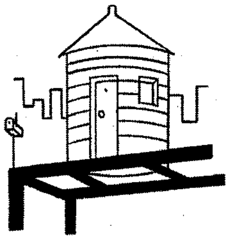
Why does this work so well? Because the Showtime—like the Veg-O-Matic before it—was designed to be the star. From the very beginning, Ron insisted that the entire door be a clear pane of glass, and that it slant back to let in the maximum amount of light, so that the chicken or the turkey or the baby-back ribs turning inside would be visible at all times. Alan Backus says that after the first version of the Showtime came out Ron began obsessing over the quality and evenness of the browning and became convinced that the rotation speed of the spit wasn't quite right. The original machine moved at four revolutions per minute. Ron set up a comparison test in his kitchen, cooking chicken after chicken at varying speeds until he determined that the optimal speed of rotation was actually six r.p.m. One can imagine a bright-eyed M.B.A. clutching a sheaf of focus-group reports and arguing that Ronco was really selling convenience and healthful living, and that it was foolish to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars retooling production in search of a more even golden brown. But Ron understood that the perfect brown is important for the same reason that the slanted glass door is important: because in every respect the design of the product must support the transparency and effectiveness of its performance during a demonstration—the better it looks onstage, the easier it is for the pitchman to go into the turn and ask for the money.

If Ron had been the one to introduce the VCR, in other words, he would not simply have sold it in an infomercial. He would also have changed the VCR itself, so that it made sense in an infomercial. The clock, for example, wouldn't be digital. (The haplessly blinking unset clock has, of course, become a symbol of frustration.) The tape wouldn't be inserted behind a hidden door—it would be out in plain view, just like the chicken in the rotisserie, so that if it was recording you could see the spools turn. The controls wouldn't be discreet buttons; they would be large, and they would make a reassuring click as they were pushed up and down, and each step of the taping process would be identified with a big, obvious numeral so that you could set it and forget it. And would it be a slender black, low-profile box? Of course not. Ours is a culture in which the term "black box" is synonymous with incomprehensibility. Ron's VCR would be in red-and-white plastic, both opaque and translucent swirl, or maybe 364 Alcoa aluminum, painted in some bold primary color, and it would sit on top of the television, not below it, so that when your neighbor or your friend came over he would spot it immediately and say, "Wow, you have one of those Ronco Tape-O-Matics!"

A REAL PIECE OF WORK

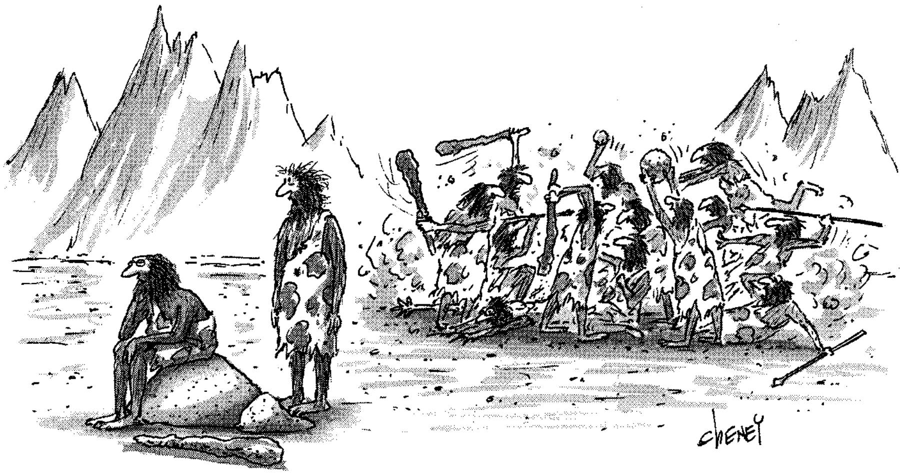
Ron Popeil did not have a happy childhood. "I remember baking a potato. It must have been when I was four or five years old," he told me. We were in his kitchen, and had just sampled some baby-back ribs from the Showtime. It had taken some time to draw the memories out of him, because he is not one to dwell on the past. "I couldn't get that baked potato into my stomach fast enough, because I was so hungry." Ron is normally in constant motion, moving his hands, chopping food, bustling back and forth. But now he was still. His parents split up when he was very young. S.J. went off to Chicago. His mother disappeared. He and his older brother, Jerry, were shipped off to a boarding school in upstate New York. "I remember seeing my mother on one occasion. I don't remember seeing my father, ever, until I moved to Chicago, at thirteen. When I was in the boarding school, the thing I remember was a Sunday when the parents visited the children, and my parents never came. Even knowing that they weren't going to show up, I walked out to the perimeter and looked out over the farmland, and there was this road." He made an undulating motion with his hand to suggest a road stretching off into the distance. "I remember standing on the road crying, looking for the movement of a car miles away, hoping that it was my mother and father. And they never came. That's all I remember about boarding school." Ron remained perfectly still. "I don't remember ever having a birthday party in my life. I remember that my grandparents took us out and we moved to Florida. My grandfather used to tie me down in bed—my hands, my wrists, and my feet. Why? Because I had a habit of turning over on my stomach and bumping my head either up and down or side to side. Why? How? I don't know the answers. But I was spread-eagle, on my back, and if I was able to twist over and do it my grandfather would wake up at night and come in and beat the hell out of me." Ron stopped, and then added, "I never liked him. I never knew my mother or her parents or any of that family. That's it. Not an awful lot to remember. Obviously, other things took place. But they have been erased."

When Ron came to Chicago, at thirteen, with his grandparents, he was put to work in the Popeil Brothers factory—but only on the weekends, when his father wasn't there. "Canned salmon and white bread for lunch, that was the diet," he recalls. "Did I live with my father? Never. I lived with my grandparents." When he became a pitchman, his father gave him just one advantage: he extended his son credit. Mel Korey says that he once drove Ron home from college and dropped him off at his father's apartment. "He had a key to the apartment, and when he walked in his dad was in bed already. His dad said, 'Is that you, Ron?' And Ron said, 'Yeah.' And his dad never came out. And by the next morning Ron still hadn't seen him." Later, when Ron went into business for himself, he was persona non grata around Popeil Brothers. "Ronnie was never allowed in the place after that," one of S.J.'s former associates recalls. "He was never let in the front door. He was never allowed to be part of anything." My father, Ron says simply, "was all business. I didn't know him personally."



Here is a man who constructed his life in the image of his father—who went into the same business, who applied the same relentless attention to the workings of the kitchen, who got his start by selling his father's own products—and where was his father? "You know, they could have done wonders together," Korey says, shaking his head. "I remember one time we talked with K-tel about joining forces, and they said that we would be a *war machine*—that was their word. Well, Ron and his dad, they could have been a war machine." For all that, it is hard to find in Ron even a trace of bitterness. Once, I asked him, "Who are your inspirations?" The first name came easily: his good friend Steve Wynn. He was silent for a moment, and then he added, "My father." Despite everything, Ron clearly found in his father's example a tradition of irresistible value. And what did Ron do with that tradition? He transcended it. He created the Showtime, which is indisputably a better gadget, dollar for dollar, than the Morris Metric Slicer, the Dutch Kitchen Shredder Grater, the Chop-O-Matic, and the Veg-O-Matic combined.

When I was in Ocean Township, visiting Arnold Morris, he took me to the local Jewish cemetery, Chesed Shel Ames, on a small hilltop just outside town. We drove slowly through the town's poorer sections in Arnold's white Mercedes. It was a rainy day. At the cemetery, a man stood out front in an undershirt, drinking a beer. We entered through a little rusty gate. "This is where it all starts," Arnold said, by which he meant that everyone—the whole spirited, squabbling clan—was buried here. We walked up and down the rows until we found, off in a corner, the Morris headstones. There was Nathan Morris, of the straw boater and the opportune heart attack, and next to him his wife, Betty. A few rows over was the family patriarch, Kidders Morris, and his wife, and a few rows from there Irving Rosenbloom, who made a fortune in plastic goods out on Long Island. Then all the Popeils, in tidy rows: Ron's grandfather Isadore, who was as mean as a snake, and his wife, Mary; S.J., who turned a cold shoulder to his own son; Ron's brother, Jerry, who died young. Ron was from them, but he was not of them. Arnold walked slowly among the tombstones, the rain dancing off his baseball cap, and then he said something that seemed perfectly right. "You know, I'll bet you you'll never find Ronnie here."



"Not voting this year?"

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ON THE AIR

One Saturday night a few weeks ago, Ron Popeil arrived at the headquarters of the television shopping network QVC, a vast gleaming complex nestled in the woods of suburban Philadelphia. Ron is a regular on QVC. He supplements his infomercials with occasional appearances on the network, and, for twenty-four hours beginning that midnight, QVC had granted him eight live slots, starting with a special "Ronco" hour between midnight and 1 A.M. Ron was travelling with his daughter Shannon, who had got her start in the business selling the Ronco Electric Food Dehydrator on the fair circuit, and the plan was that the two of them would alternate throughout the day. They were pitching a Digital Jog Dial version of the Showtime, in black, available for one day only, at a "special value" of $129.72.

In the studio, Ron had set up eighteen Digital Jog Dial Showtimes on five wood-panelled gurneys. From Los Angeles, he had sent, via Federal Express, dozens of Styrofoam containers with enough meat for each of the day's airings: eight fifteen-pound turkeys, seventy-two hamburgers, eight legs of lamb, eight ducks, thirty-odd chickens, two dozen or so Rock Cornish game hens, and on and on, supplementing them with garnishes, trout, and some sausage bought that morning at three Philadelphia-area supermarkets. QVC's target was thirty-seven thousand machines, meaning that it hoped to gross about $4.5 million during the twenty-four hours—a huge day, even by the network's standards. Ron seemed tense. He barked at the team of QVC producers and cameramen bustling around the room. He fussed over the hero plates—the ready-made dinners that he would use to showcase meat taken straight from the oven. "Guys, this is impossible," he said, peering at a tray of mashed potatoes and gravy. "The level of gravy must be higher." He was limping a little. "You know, there's a lot of pressure on you," he said wearily. " 'How did Ron do? Is he still the best?' "

With just a few minutes to go, Ron ducked into the greenroom next to the studio to put GLH in his hair: a few aerosol bursts, followed by vigorous brushing. "Where is God right now?" his co-host, Rick Domeier, yelled out, looking around theatrically for his guest star. "Is God backstage?" Ron then appeared, resplendent in a chef's coat, and the cameras began to roll. He sliced open a leg of lamb. He played with the dial of the new digital Showtime. He admired the crispy, succulent skin of the duck. He discussed the virtues of the new food-warming feature—where the machine would rotate at low heat for up to four hours after the meat was cooked in order to keep the juices moving—and, all the while, bantered so convincingly with viewers calling in on the testimonial line that it was as if he were back mesmerizing the secretaries in the Woolworth's at State and Washington.

In the greenroom, there were two computer monitors. The first displayed a line graph charting the number of calls that came in at any given second. The second was an electronic ledger showing the total sales up to that point. As Ron took flight, one by one, people left the studio to gather around the computers. Shannon Popeil came first. It was 12:40 A.M. In the studio, Ron was slicing onions with one of his father's Dial-O-Matics. She looked at the second monitor and gave a little gasp. Forty minutes in, and Ron had already passed seven hundred thousand dollars. A QVC manager walked in. It was 12:48 A.M., and Ron was roaring on: $837,650. "It can't be!" he cried out. "That's unbelievable!" Two QVC producers came over. One of them pointed at the first monitor, which was graphing the call volume. "Jump," he called out. "Jump!" There were only a few minutes left. Ron was extolling the virtues of the oven one final time, and, sure enough, the line began to take a sharp turn upward, as all over America viewers took out their wallets. The numbers on the second screen began to change in a blur of recalculation—rising in increments of $129.72 plus shipping and taxes. "You know, we're going to hit a million dollars, just on the first hour," one of the QVC guys said, and there was awe in his voice. It was one thing to talk about how Ron was the best there ever was, after all, but quite another to see proof of it, before your very eyes. At that moment, on the other side of the room, the door opened, and a man appeared, stooped and drawn but with a smile on his face. It was Ron Popeil, who invented a better rotisserie in his kitchen and went out and pitched it himself. There was a hush, and then the whole room stood up and cheered. ♦

LETTER FROM BELGRADE

THE REDEEMERS

Can Serbia's new leaders overcome the legacy of Slobodan Milosevic?

BY MISHA GLENNY

In Belgrade, a harsh, dry autumnal heat usually lasts well into late September or early October. People swelter in sweat-drenched T-shirts, with dust kicking against the backs of their throats, and then, suddenly, clouds descend and the humidity increases for two or three days. At this point, you start bracing yourself for the *kosava*, an icy wind that whips in from the east and tunnels its way through Knez Mihailova, the main shopping boulevard. On October 5th, as I drove over Branko Bridge toward the old city, I noted that it was the first day of climatic transition.

It was a Thursday, a little before noon, but there wasn't much traffic. Driving in Belgrade had been risky for several days, because members of the Resistance group Otpor had been alternately throwing up barricades and dismantling them. Improvised piles of scrap vehicles and trash cans could spring up suddenly, trapping you in the wrong part of town for hours. Otpor's barricades had been the primary expression of civil disobedience in Belgrade, and there was no sign of them now, but to be on the safe side and to protect the car from either revolutionary fervor or vindictive policing, I parked it on a quiet street just past the Moskva Hotel, a remnant of Art Nouveau architecture. The city has suffered more bombing than any other European capital in the twentieth century except Warsaw, and not much of historical significance has survived. Although Belgrade rises at the spectacular confluence of the Danube and Sava Rivers, it is an ugly place dominated by grim, gray buildings put up in the nineteen-fifties and sixties.

A campaign of civil disobedience and a general strike had been in effect throughout Serbia since September 29th, the day after the federal election commission announced that Vojislav Kostunica, the Presidential candidate of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia, or DOS, a recently cobbled together coalition of eighteen traditionally fractured parties, had failed to win an outright victory over Slobodan Milosevic in the general elections. A reserved and thoughtful academic and a constitutional lawyer committed to legitimate institutions, Kostunica appeared to be incorruptible, which set him apart from leading Serb politicians of any persuasion. Since he had so clearly won a majority of votes, and since the election commission had so clearly been going through contortions to fix the result to benefit Milosevic, DOS refused to participate in the farce of a runoff election. It would try to force Milosevic's hand by mobilizing the nearly two and a half million people who voted for Kostunica.

Despite his Marxist education, Milosevic appeared blind to the implications of a workers' rebellion. He gave a speech on Saturday, September 30th, at a military academy near Belgrade, warning that "the enemy within" was about to launch a perfidious attack on behalf of American imperialism. He seemed not to understand what was happening in the Serbian provinces. Perhaps he was fooled by the normal flow of life in Belgrade. The capital was the one place where the campaign of civil disobedience and the strike took only partial hold. The most common explanation for Belgrade's passivity was "the media blockade." Independent radio and television have been proliferating throughout the provinces since the end of the Kosovo war last year, but in Belgrade the propaganda of Radio Television Serbia and other pro-government stations dominated the airwaves. The main independent outlets were either controlled by the state or jammed.

Belgraders were also afraid that Milosevic might use the full force of the police and military in the event of a confrontation. Resistance in Belgrade, although steady and widespread, has traditionally been channelled through institutions: political parties, research centers, and even, on occasion, parliament. The peasants in central and southern Serbia, on the other hand, have several times in modern history exploded violently after tolerating oppressive regimes for years—sometimes decades. The most famous of these incidents was the Timok Rebellion of 1883, which was sparked by the refusal of King Milan Obrenovic to acknowledge that the Serbian Radicals, peasant socialists inspired by Russian *narodnik* ideology, had won a huge electoral victory. The tactics used by the peasants then were similar to those employed this September and October. They barricaded the main roads and government offices in eastern and central Serbia and liberated nearly a third of the country. The rebels were on the verge of cutting Serbia in two along an east-west axis when King Milan persuaded the Army to use its new Austrian cannon on them. The leaders of the uprising, first-generation intellectuals of peasant stock, either fled the country or were captured and killed.

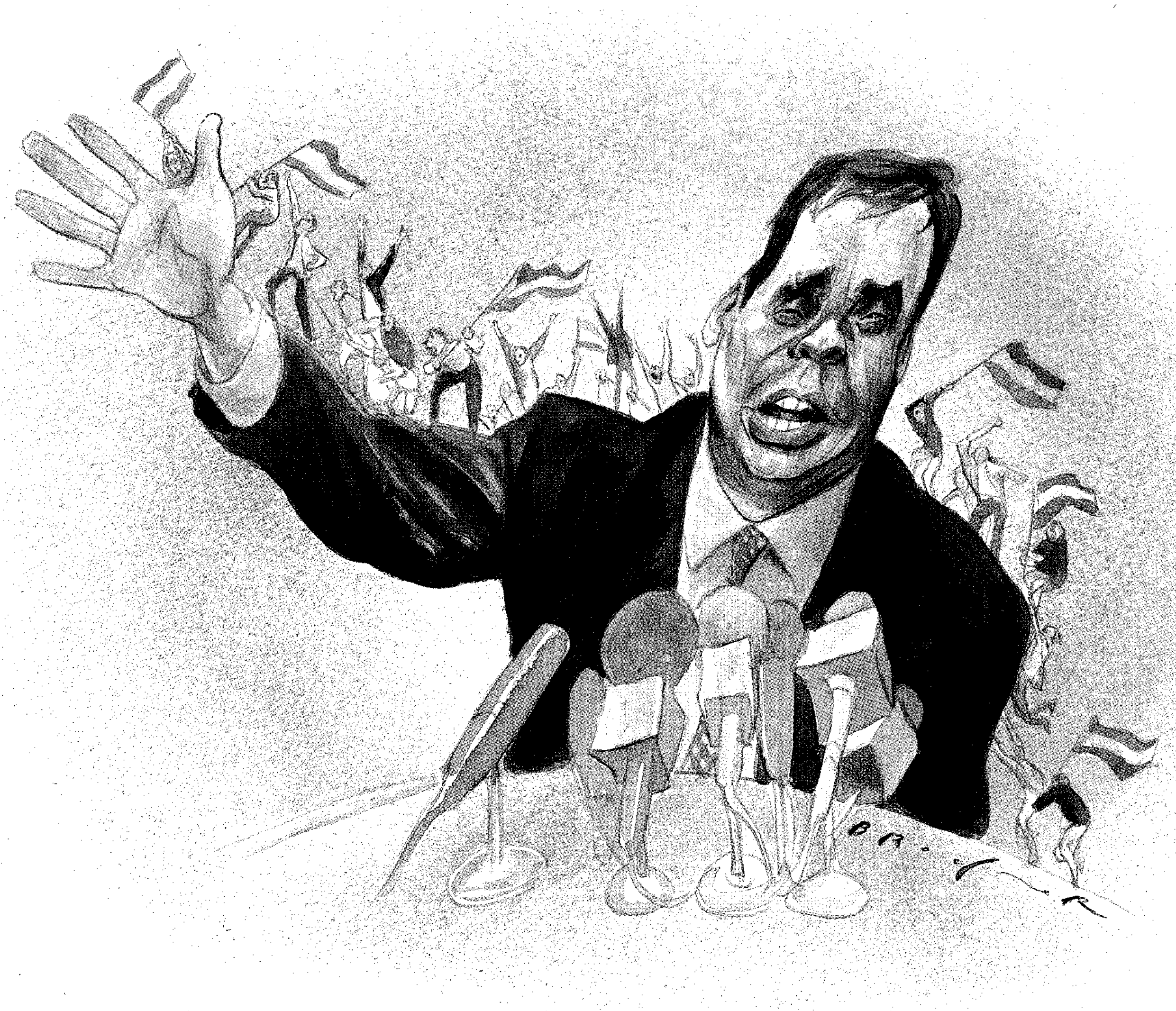
By the beginning of October this year, while the citizens of Belgrade hesitated to rally aggressively behind Kostunica and DOS, the provinces were losing patience. The anger of farmers was exacerbated by a dearth of diesel fuel, spare parts, and fertilizer, and by the fact that the government refused to guarantee set prices for farm products. For the first time since Milosevic came to power, rural workers joined with militants in the provincial cities to put their full weight behind a protest movement.

The morning of October 5th, over breakfast, I had reflected upon one particular sentence in that day's edition of *V.I.P.*, which had arrived by fax, as usual, sometime before dawn. *V.I.P.* is a newsletter that journalists, opposition activists, government officials, and many others in Belgrade—in addition to academics and the staffs of foreign ministries around the world—scrutinize to make sense of the bewildering cascade of statements, rumors, and lies that are essential to political life in Yugoslavia. It lists them all, in English, according to importance and credibility, occasionally adding analyses that are striking in their accuracy and reliability. The commentaries in *V.I.P.* are unsigned, but everybody knows that they come from Braca Grubacic, who is perhaps the best-informed person in the country. Grubacic somehow maintained close contact with both Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party and the key opposition figures. Rumor has it that he worked for State Security—a common accusation in Yugoslavia but damaging nonetheless. As far as I have been able to ascertain, however, everybody trusted Grubacic except State Security.

The sentence that was so intriguing in *V.I.P.* that morning was part of a statement from DOS. It said that the opposition would "insist on non-violent forms of pressure," which was Kostunica's position. But—and this is what was significant—"the citizens have made it clear that they will no longer be victims who will yield to the violence of Slobodan Milosevic's regime without offering resistance." A group of provincial mayors had proposed a march on Belgrade and had discussed it over the weekend of September 30th with DOS leaders, who promised their support. The project was launched under the slogan "Srbija Dolazi u Beograd" ("Serbia Comes to Belgrade"). *V.I.P.* seemed to be indicating that the opposition was going to use force to bring down Milosevic. Or was the ambiguity of the phrasing a result of two different schools of thought within the opposition?

A few hours later, I ran into the descendants of the nineteenth-century Timok rebels, coming toward me along Knez Milos, the boulevard that links the center of town with Dedinje, the luxurious neighborhood where Milosevic lives. A huge parade of men, about five abreast and five hundred yards long, was moving north toward me on the right-hand side of the road. They were chanting the names of the two towns they came from, a few hours distant, in western Sumadija, the geographical and historical heart of modern Serbia: "Cacak! Valjevo! Cacak! Valjevo!"

I joined the parade just before it passed the Ministry of Defense, still the mangled wreck fashioned seventeen months earlier by NATO bombs. The Sumadija warriors ignored it, keeping their eyes straight ahead, in the direction of Takovska Street and Tasmajdan Park. On this day, Slobodan Milosevic was their target, not the West. The men were dressed in jean jackets, T-shirts, and worn work pants. They would never pass muster in Belgrade's



"It haunts me," President Kostunica says about the difficulties of succeeding Milosevic. "The terrible responsibility haunts me."

STEVE BRODNER

"Well, if it doesn't matter who's right and who's wrong, why don't I be right and you be wrong?"

• •

genteel society, the *fin svet*, with its coffeehouses, receptions, and educated middle class. Their faces were unshaven, and many were pockmarked or scarred. Their forearms resembled legs of mutton. Among them were workers from a vacuum-cleaner factory that was badly hit during the NATO campaign. Many others worked for a large food-processing company that produces jams and preserves made from fruit grown in the rich orchards surrounding Cacak.

Nowadays there is scant evidence of the thick forest, or *suma*, from which the Sumadija region takes its name. It had been cleared by early in the twentieth century to make way for an expanding pig-farming industry. But in the nineteenth century Sumadija was an impenetrable area that hid the *hajduks*, peasant outlaws whose exploits were recorded in epic poems and songs. Men from this region formed the core of the force that drove the Ottomans from Serbia in the uprisings of 1804 and 1815. Ever since then, the Sumadinci have had a particular importance in Serbian national mythology. If the Sumadinci march to the front, it is said, the battle is already half won. They are less temperamental than the mountain Serbs of Croatia, Bosnia, and Montenegro. They do not take up arms as readily. But once roused, they are determined and fierce. When central Serbia resisted the Germans at the beginning of the Second World War, Valjevo and Cacak provided the highest percentage of non-Communist fighters pitted against the Wehrmacht's regional command posts. Less honorably, many of the paramilitaries who murdered large numbers of people in the Croatian regions of Kordun and Banija in the summer of 1991 came from Valjevo and nearby Loznica.

Every ten yards or so, a demonstrator waved a huge flag. Some of the flags represented the Democratic Party, the largest opposition group in DOS, and some displayed Otpor's clenched white fist on a black background. But the dominant symbol belonged to the Chetniks, the Serbian royalists who have covered Serbia with both glory and shame for a hundred years. The Chetnik movement evolved from the *chetas*, the Serbian guerrilla bands that terrorized the Macedonian countryside in the first decade of the twentieth century as they competed for dominance of the key strategic territory of the southern Balkans against their equally ferocious Bulgarian and Greek counterparts, the *komitadjis* and the *andartes*. The Chetniks helped to impose a rule of terror over the Kosovo Albanians and the Macedonians after Serbia had absorbed their territories in the First Balkan War of 1912. During the First World War, they contributed to the heroic defense of Serbia against the Austro-Hungarian Empire and to the Allies' victory on the Macedonian front. During the Second World War, the British and the Americans criticized the Chetnik Movement, as the followers of Commander Draza Mihailovic were known, for not standing up to the Germans the way Tito's Communist Partisans did. But that is a simplistic version of the truth, which was successfully reinforced by Titoist historians in the postwar period. In some areas, the Chetniks fought courageously against both the Nazis and the Partisans in a struggle against totalitarianism in the Balkans.

As a Communist, Slobodan Milosevic put down political roots with Tito, but during the nineties he cunningly melded the symbolism of Yugoslav Communism with that of Serbian nationalism. For a time, the Red Star and the Chetniks' four Cyrillic "S"s were afforded equal prominence, just as senior representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church were carefully placed beside leading Yugoslav and Serbian Communists on ceremonial occasions. In order to prosecute his proxy wars in Croatia and Bosnia, Milosevic needed the support both of Partisan generals in the Yugoslav military and of Chetnik paramilitaries. Depending on his audience and his tactical requirements, he would emphasize as his war aim either the maintenance of a Yugoslav federation to fight secessionist movements or the establishment of a new order that would permit "all Serbs to live in one state"—a Greater Serbia.

The Chetniks believed that they were again fighting the battle they had fought in the Second World War, a battle against Croats, Muslims, and Albanians (supported this time around by American imperialists) who wanted nothing less than the "extermination of the Serbs," as a Chetnik position paper put it sixty years ago. When Milosevic decided to capitulate to NATO in Kosovo, the many Chetnik paramilitary groups that were there to loot and to expel and murder Albanians felt that the Yugoslav military could have held out longer. Milosevic ordered the paramilitaries to disarm and to return to civilian life, and at this point, according to intelligence sources in Belgrade, they finally turned against him.

During the march, I found myself beside a big man in a loose white peasant shirt who carried the Chetnik standard: a skull and crossbones surrounded by the words "*Sloboda ili smrt—od Korduna do Soluna*" ("Freedom or death—from Kordun to Salonika"). I doubt that any Croat would be surprised by the now illusory claim to Kordun, a rural area south of Zagreb, but I wonder how the Greeks, supposedly lasting friends of the Serbian people, would react to a Serbian push toward the northern Greek port of Thessaloniki. I asked the man next to the standard-bearer why he had come to Belgrade that morning. "To bring down the government," he said simply, "and we won't leave until we finish the job." Then he grinned, and flashed open his jacket to reveal a pistol. All around us men were singing, "*Spasi Srbiju, i ubij se, Slobodane, Slobodane!*" ("Save Serbia and kill yourself, Slobodan, Slobodan"). The first phrase has powerful nationalist and religious significance for Serbs. The second taunts Milosevic, whose parents both committed suicide.

At National Front Street, I left the marchers and went into the headquarters of the FreeB92 Radio station to talk to Veran Matic, a jovial, optimistic, and hardworking man with a thick, closely trimmed black beard and mustache. Over the past eleven years, Matic has built up the best radio news-gathering service in the country and expanded the company into publishing and film production. At the start of the Kosovo war in 1999, armed police entered the station's studios in Dom Omladine, a building in the old town, and seized all the equipment. It was not long before B92 had regrouped as a pirate station, broadcasting on various frequencies and over the Internet in order to dodge the zealous jammers of the Telecommunications Ministry. Denounced as a NATO spy at home, Matic was accused by detractors abroad of giving succor to Milosevic when he published an article on the New York *Times* Op-Ed page criticizing the NATO bombing.

Matic took me out onto a balcony, away from eavesdroppers. Unlike many Serbs, he is rarely conspiratorial, so when he indicates that he has something important to say, I listen. "Otpor is going to storm Dom Omladine at three o'clock," he told me. "The plan is to seize the studios and feed the output of our present studio back into Dom Omladine and onto 92.5 FM again." He also told me that DOS was planning a similar action at Radio Television Serbia, the most imposing symbol of Milosevic's power.

I walked across Tasmajdan Park to the DOS office, which is on a pretty, cobblestoned street. Several tall, bull-like paramilitary types with stubbly beards were stationed protectively around the building. Like the demonstrators from Sumadija, they let their jackets slip open to reveal guns. Inside, the organizers of the protests strolled in and out of meetings. While I was chatting in the reception area, Cedomir Jovanovic, one of DOS's key operational figures, walked in. He muttered something about a flak jacket, and patted his rigid chest. "You're going to need one," he said. "We're going to storm the parliament. It is all planned. We will demand the government's resignation and insist on the recognition of Kostunica." I was taking notes and realized that I had actually forgotten the date, so I asked one of the many young receptionists who are a hallmark of opposition activity to remind me. "*Sudnji dan*," she replied. Judgment Day.

As though they were playing in a Feydeau farce, President-elect Kostunica and Zoran Djindjic, the head of the Democratic Party, kept leaving and rejoining a meeting through a variety of doors so as to avoid bumping into each other. The two faces of Serbia's revolution could hardly be less similar. Kostunica's meek expression, a mop of dark hair that covers his face, and his hesitant shuffle indicate that he is a reluctant rev-

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olutionary. Djindjic, almost too handsome, looks sleek and poised. He makes revolution sexy. Kostunica eked out an existence as an academic researcher after he was fired from a university job because of his political views. He is the consummate East European dissident. Djindjic, by contrast, is a politician (although he, too, has an accomplished academic record) and has worked part time as a businessman, dealing in industrial machinery from Eastern-bloc countries.

Kostunica speaks English well and can converse in French and in German. He is widely read, and has translated "The Federalist Papers" and written scholarly analyses of Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, and Locke. Yet he rarely travels outside Serbia. He spends his summers in a small house in the central Serbian countryside, tootling around in a battered old Yugo. He is intellectually cosmopolitan but leads a life that is very private, parochial, and deeply attached to Serbian culture in the narrow sense. He abhors violence and is politically inexperienced.

Djindjic strutted around DOS headquarters, dictating instructions to an adoring mobile crisis unit. Kostunica had won the election and was theoretically now the President of the Yugoslav federation, but one got the sense that Djindjic had to protect the revolution from Kostunica's existential doubt. Djindjic had been preparing for this moment almost his entire adult life. Since the early seventies, when he studied for a doctorate in philosophy under Jürgen Habermas in Germany, he has devoted himself to rebellion. He is brash but organized and he dominates small groups.

Kostunica is a constitutionalist whose authority derives from a mass popular following. Djindjic is a populist who depends on an institution, the Democratic Party, for his power. The two don't seem to like each other much, but at this moment each depended utterly on the other's presence and peculiar abilities.

As I walked along Kosovska Street toward the back of the parliament building, the shouts and whistling became deafening. Workers from the country's largest oil refinery had draped themselves over an oil truck daubed with the message "Pancevo on strike." An elegant gray-haired woman I took to be in her eighties shook a baby rattle rhythmically. (The popular expression for Milosevic's end is "broken like a rattle.") "*Gotov je! Gotov je!*"—"He's finished. He's finished!"—she kept repeating. A group of bikers drove around on Yamahas, frenetically waving the Democratic Party flag. "*Srbija je ustala! Srbija je ustala!*" ("Serbia has arisen!") was the common cry of farmers, workers, intellectuals, students, policemen, soldiers, Gypsies, Hungarians and Slovaks from Vojvodina, Muslims from the Sandzak. A few days later, opposition leaders would play down the spontaneous nature of this moment, claiming that they had had everything planned through contacts in the Army, police, and State Security. But they could have struck a thousand deals with hesitating sympathizers inside Milosevic's apparatus and it would have come to nothing had not perhaps half a million people gathered together in one Belgrade square.

Near Tasmajdan Park, the crowd coming toward me got thicker. I was confused about what they were doing until I noticed the red eyes, the choking. They had been caught in a tear-gas attack. At the top of Knez Milos, I was swept away by a brigade of Otpor activists with bandannas over their faces and fists out. "Back we go! Back we go!" they chanted, sweeping me forward, in the direction of the parliament building. I wriggled away from them and into the park, where hundreds of people were retching or lying on the ground.

From a slight incline in the park, I could see the parliament building, which was on fire. Flames shot out and demonstrators ecstatically waved flags and smashed windows. On the steps that sweep up to the main entrance, the police were in disorganized retreat. I tried to get closer, but I was stuck in a thick fog of gas that attacked my windpipe and stung my eyes. Mucus started pouring from my nose, and I stumbled over people lying on the ground and twitching, or hiding behind cars, their faces buried in their shirts.

Back in the park, the gas lifted and the crowd regrouped. People hurled abuse at the retreating police. "*Ustase! Ustase!*" they screamed, using the term for Croatia's Second World War fascists. There was a platform in front of the parliament, and soon people were giving little speeches about the glorious revolution. A soldier received a hysterical reception when he announced, "We will never shoot on the people!" A Chetnik demanded the return of Kosovo. "Kosovo is Serbia, Kosovo is Serbia!" Milan Protic, the newly elected mayor of Belgrade, took the stage and begged the crowd to put out the fire in the parliament building, which was burning down behind him.

By this time, the party had begun. Techno-pop anthems were pumping out of gigantic loudspeakers. People were dancing, embracing, praying. I wove through the merrymakers and made it to Braca Grubacic's offices, where the *V.I.P.* newsletter is produced. Grubacic sat sipping a whiskey and smoking a Marlboro Light. "It is all over now, Misha," he said. "It is done, thanks God."

A few days later, after Vojislav Kostunica had officially been inaugurated as President, he and I sat together in a room that seemed to be half the length of a football field, at the Palace of the Federation, on Lenin Boulevard. "This is my office according to the constitution," Kostunica explained. Milosevic had preferred the White Palace, the former royal residence. Waiters and butlers were scurrying around, perplexed but enthusiastic, relearning their jobs. For years, they had turned up for work every day and done nothing. Their situation was just a small example of the mess left by Milosevic. Nothing works properly in Belgrade, and it will take years to put things right. "It haunts me," Kostunica said morosely. "The terrible responsibility haunts me."

When I asked Kostunica to tell me about his childhood, he was not particularly introspective or reflective. He spoke of the intellectual influences of Serbian liberalism on him and his father and then pointedly brought up a historical irony that is evidently very important to him. "A few weeks after I was born, in Belgrade on March 24, 1944," he told me, "there was a massive Anglo-American bombing campaign that resulted in the destruction of central Belgrade and a large number of civilian casualties. Several hospitals were hit and my parents were forced to flee the capital with me to escape the attack waves." The bombing was aimed at the Nazi occupiers of Serbia, but the collateral damage was enormous. "Fifty-five years later," Kostunica went on, "my birthday coincided with the opening of another Anglo-American-led bombing campaign whose targets were not just in Belgrade but in large parts of Serbia."

Serbs would not have voted for Kostunica if he were not a nationalist. He attacked Milosevic relentlessly for what he calls the regime's "betrayal" of Serbs in Croatia and Kosovo, and he made it clear that he considered the United States complicit in that betrayal for supporting "Albanian terrorism" as a means to America's imperialist ends. Kostunica's suspicion of great powers (he has no kind words to say about the Russians, either) is nonetheless ameliorated by his obsession with democracy and the rule of law, and his abhorrence of violence. He has often criticized the Hague Tribunal on war crimes because he considers it a policy instrument of the United States and not an organ of impartial justice. And yet two years ago he openly criticized Milosevic for restricting the visas of tribunal members, since this violated a commitment of coöperation made in the Dayton peace agreement. "Everything must take place within a democratic or legal framework," he says, and it is almost inconceivable that Kostunica would consider war or violence a legitimate political instrument.

Most discussion of Serbian politics inside and outside the country during the Milosevic years has been refracted through the prism of the question of nationalism. In 1987, Milosevic tapped a rich vein of Serb-nationalist neurosis to destroy his domestic political opponents. He did so with the collaboration, both active and passive, of a large number of Serbs inside Serbia's boundaries and beyond them. It is impossible to quantify this support, since it emerged within a one-party system and was manipulated by the organs of a totalitarian state. Unlike Hitler, Milosevic didn't succeed within a democracy.

In 1988, Milosevic launched what he called an "anti-bureaucratic revolution." Yugoslavia was at that time divided into eight parts, two of which, the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, were led by politicians who were hostile to Milosevic. Part of another republic, Montenegro, was home to a strong pro-Serb population. Inspired by Milosevic's populist slogans, tens of thousands of Serb demonstrators took to the streets and stormed the regional governments in Vojvodina and Montenegro. In Kosovo, Milosevic simply bullied the legitimate government, which included many Albanians, out of office. This did not rid Yugoslavia of bureaucracy but, rather, replaced the legally constituted bureaucracy with Milosevic cronies. Kosovo and Vojvodina were stripped of their autonomy and leaders of the Montenegrin government stepped into line behind Milosevic. The government of Serbia gained control of their votes in the Yugoslav federation, which meant that Milosevic could pretty much bulldoze through whatever policy he wanted. Many Serbs, now fed up with Milosevic, have conveniently forgotten the fanatical support they lent him at the time.

A majority of Serbs were convinced that they were involved in necessary defensive wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and they were often unaware of or unwilling to believe the stories of atrocities being committed in their name. Milosevic and his collaborators commissioned the butchery of hundreds of thousands of people, most of them non-Serbs. This not only brought about the complete destruction of Yugoslavia. With the defeats in Croatia and Kosovo and the partial defeat in Bosnia, the very nationalist goals that Milosevic had promised to achieve also lay in tatters. In historical terms, this is, incidentally, Milosevic's only positive achievement. He killed the possibility of a Greater Serbian revival.

The Hungarians of Vojvodina and the Muslims of the Sandzak both supported DOS and the events of October 5th, which is a good beginning for a process of internal reconciliation. (The Kosovo Albanians are a separate case because they now live in a U.N. protectorate.) But Serbia's neighbors are understandably suspicious about what is happening in the country. First, they do not believe that the leopard has changed its spots. Second, they fear that Western financial and political aid will be diverted from them to the Serbs. There are concrete steps that Kostunica and DOS could take to alleviate these fears. They could, for instance, publicly renounce territorial claims on Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Bosnia's case, Yugoslavia could also upgrade its diplomatic mission in Sarajevo to full ambassadorial level. Issues like the massacre of Srebrenica and the siege of Vukovar will require much more time. It took three decades for the Germans to come to terms with the Nazis' crimes, and the Japanese are still in denial about atrocities they committed in the nineteen-thirties and forties. In Serbia, the issue is complicated by the fact that many Serbs were also victims. Serbia is host to the largest refugee population in Europe: more than six hundred thousand Serbs from all over the former Yugoslavia. It is unrealistic to expect that a people traumatized by Milosevic, by regional wars, and by a war with NATO will immediately turn to investigating their collective responsibility for ten years of regional violence.

There has been a fearful breakdown of internal civil order in Serbia. The wars in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo spawned a violent criminal class throughout the former Yugoslavia, especially in Serbia. Plunder, arms and drug smuggling, prostitution, and, later, sanctions-busting created great wealth for these people. They in turn provided security and money for Milosevic. His state, or what remained of it, facilitated the expropriation of businesses and banks on the gangsters' behalf.

"Selective breeding has given me an aptitude for the law, but I still love fetching a dead duck out of freezing water."

In Kostunica's most influential book, "Party Pluralism or Monism," written with a co-author in 1983, he observed, "In the development of a society, there exist relatively rare moments when the art of creative politics can act unbound. This is the time that immediately follows seizure of powers and revolutions when those at the center of power have at their disposal much greater freedom of choice in fashioning basic social and political institutions than is the case under ordinary circumstances." Kostunica now finds himself in precisely this position. But at the very moment when he needs to exercise his freedom of choice in building new democratic institutions in Yugoslavia, he is trapped by his obsession with legal procedure. His supporters greatly fear the indecision that is often written in his face. "The radical wing of DOS had made preparations"—for the resistance in early October—"about which they kept me in the dark," he told me. "There was a lot I didn't know about." The man who launched a million Serbs was uncomfortable with their revolutionary potential. "I was frightened of the violence of the regime and I was worried about a possible violent response of the people that might destroy everything we had achieved."

Only a few weeks after the events in Belgrade on October 5th, Kostunica's position looks precarious. He has neglected to form a professional cabinet of advisers to deal with the immense political and organizational problems now facing him. His competitors command well-oiled machines that are skilled in outsmarting opponents, and all the while, of course, Slobodan Milosevic sits in his house in Dedinje and maintains his contacts in the Army and the secret police.

Kostunica's power is based on the popular support with which he was able to deliver the decisive blow to Milosevic, and he is not inclined to use this popularity to strengthen the limited powers of his office: he can convene, dismiss, and dissolve parliament, and he is chairman of the Supreme Defense Council, which commands the Yugoslav Army. The little he can do is dependent on the proper functioning of the Yugoslav federation, which is now the union of Serbia with Montenegro. In the absence of a working federation, power devolves to the two republics, whose governments may act for all intents and purposes as two different countries.

Milo Djukanovic, Montenegro’s reformist President, has been reluctant to back Kostunica. But if Kostunica fails either to form a new federal government or to persuade Montenegro to remain in the federation, his power will start to evaporate. A new Serbian parliament will be elected in December, which will almost certainly mean the end of Milosevic’s Socialist Party in its present form and a victory for DOS. The current Serbian President, Milan Milutinovic—a Milosevic stooge and an indicted war criminal—will undoubtedly leave soon after. Zoran Djindjic will probably become the most influential politician in Serbia, because his party will control more seats in parliament than any other party. It is possible to imagine a functioning Serbian government and a functioning Montenegrin government but no Yugoslav government, in which case Kostunica’s role would be reduced to accepting the credentials of new ambassadors and opening rebuilt hospitals.

“I have the six figures, the stock options, and the limo, but where are the letters from grateful schoolchildren?”

• •

In the days after October 5th, Djindjic and his supporters began accumulating power using non-parliamentary methods. They formed a DOS crisis headquarters, independent of Kostunica. Crisis committees began seizing control of key government institutions, like the federal customs service, banks, and large enterprises. DOS justified their actions by pointing quite reasonably to the danger of Milosevic attempting to restore his power through these institutions. But some of Kostunica’s supporters believe that people around Djindjic were consolidating their power at the expense of Kostunica.

Djindjic is not popular with ordinary Serbs. For one thing, he is regarded by many of them as an outsider. Some of the worst Serb leaders over the last ten years were not from Serbia proper but from the Serbian populations of Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, or Montenegro. Slobodan Milosevic was born in Pozarevac, in Serbia, but his family is from Montenegro. Djindjic comes from Samac, in Bosnia. Kostunica is a Srbijanac, a Serb from Serbia proper, or Narrow Serbia. He was born in Belgrade, but his father is from the heartland of central Sumadija. Djindjic was criticized for negotiating with Milosevic in 1997 about a possible power-sharing deal, and he compromised his reputation further when he fled Serbia for the comparative safety of Montenegro during the NATO bombing campaign. He had good cause to suspect that Milosevic might try to kill him, but in the eyes of his compatriots this was cowardice. Djindjic could not have beaten Milosevic and he knew it. But he is a good politician, and he saw that Kostunica could prise open the Milosevic regime. His support of Kostunica for President was tactically shrewd.

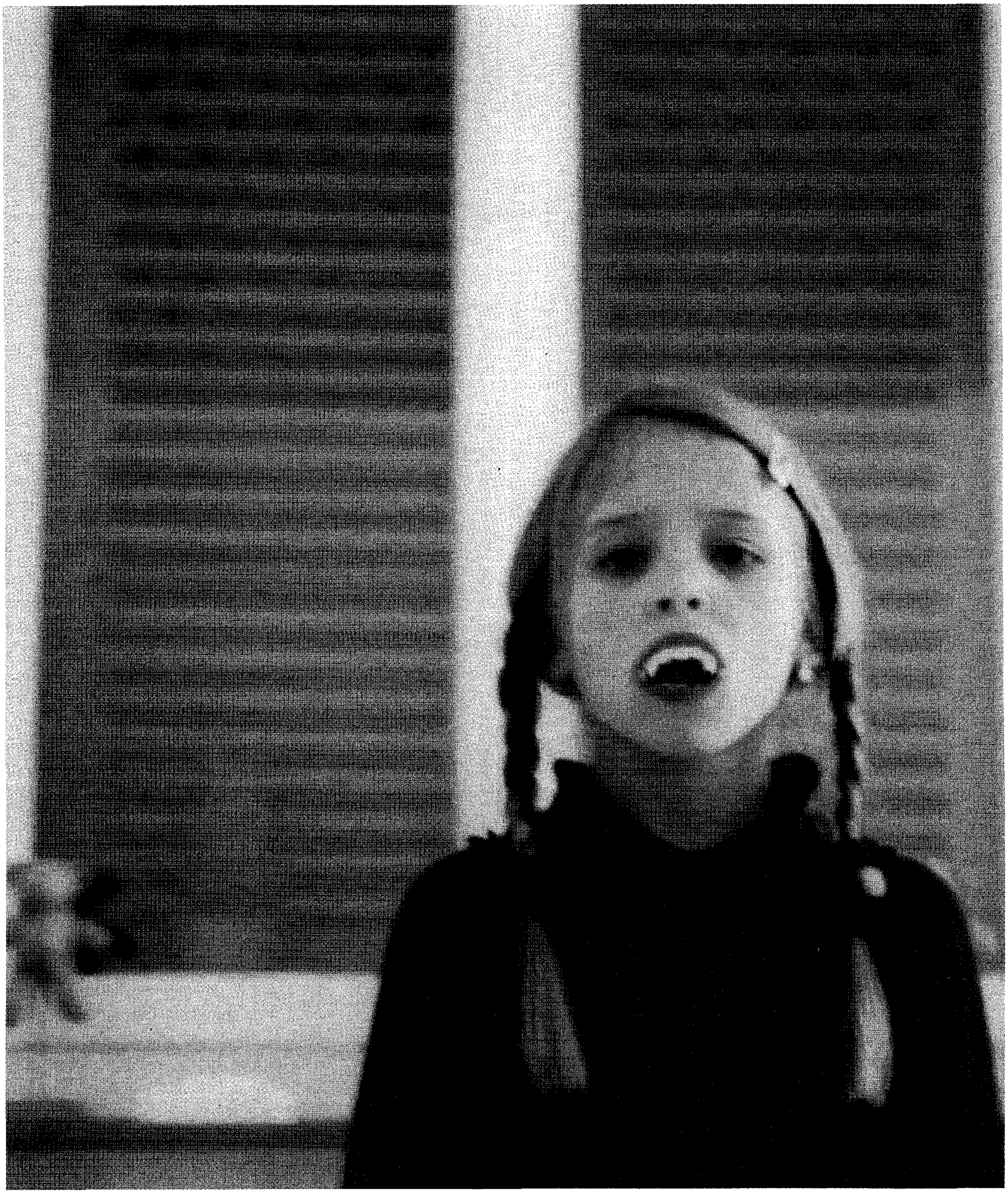
Kostunica does possess one considerable political advantage that he is learning to use deftly—the West. Persuaded by his sincerity, both the European Union and the United States were quick to lift the first wall of sanctions on Yugoslavia. This was a political triumph for Kostunica domestically. “He is the key player in the diplomatic and economic rehabilitation of Yugoslavia, and this is reinforcing his reputation not just with ordinary Serbs but with important figures inside DOS as well,” a senior Western diplomat said to me in mid-October. “He is the face that gives Yugoslavia credibility.”

That Yugoslavia is still a complete mess is a truism, but the prospect of a nonviolent, nonaggressive, democratic Serbia brings with it a monumental historical opportunity—nothing less than peace in the Balkans. For more than a hundred and twenty years, the region has endured exceptional brutality and destruction, even by the standards of twentieth-century Europe. In the First World War, the Balkans were fought over by the Austro-Hungarians and the Russians. Twenty-three years later, the Nazis tore through the region viciously, triggering many of the bloody struggles that were tragically repeated in the nineteen-nineties. In the most recent wars, which were not pan-Balkan but pan-Yugoslav, Milosevic and his cohorts were the chief villains. When Kostunica said to me that he is haunted by the responsibility he has been given, he was talking about the responsibility to a Serbia that was sinned against by Milosevic and to a Serbia that sinned with him. Kostunica has a redemptive quality, but there is so much redeeming to be done that one wonders if he has the necessary strength. It seems clear at this point, however, as a striking miner said to me in the first few days of October, “*Nema drugog*”: there is no one else. ♦

FICTION

WHAT I SAW FROM WHERE I STOOD

BY MARISA SILVER



Dulcie is afraid of freeways. She doesn't like not being able to get off whenever she wants, and sometimes I catch her holding her breath between exits, as if she's driving through a graveyard. So, even though the party we went to last week was miles from our apartment in Silver Lake, we drove home on the surface streets.

I was drunk, and Dulcie was driving my car. She'd taken one look at me as we left the party, then dug her fingers into my front pocket and pulled out my keys. I liked the feel of her hand rubbing against me through my jeans; she hadn't been touching me much lately.

I cranked open the window to clear my head as we drove through Santa Monica. Nice houses. Pretty flowers. Volvos. Dulcie and I always say we'd never want to live out here in suburbia, but the truth is, we can't afford to, not on our salaries. Dulcie's a second-grade teacher in Glendale, and I'm a repairman for the telephone company.

When we reached Hollywood, things got livelier. There were skinny guitar punks patrolling the clubs on the strip with their pudgy girlfriends in midriff tops and thigh-high black skirts. A lot of big hair, big breasts, boredom. Further east, there were boys strutting the boulevard, waiting to slip into someone's silver Mercedes and make a buck. One leaned against a fire hydrant and picked at his sallow face, looking cold in a muscle T-shirt.

We hit a red light at Vermont, right next to the hospital where Dulcie lost the baby, a year ago. She'd started cramping badly one night. She was only six months pregnant. I called the emergency room, and the attendant said to come right over. By the time we got there, the doctors couldn't pick up a heartbeat. They gave Dulcie drugs to induce labor, and the baby was born. He was blue. He was no bigger than a football.

Dulcie looked up at the hospital and then back at the road. She's a small girl, and she sank behind the wheel, getting even smaller. I didn't say anything. The light turned green. She drove across Vermont and I nodded off.

I woke up when a car plowed into us from behind. My body flew toward the windshield, then ricocheted back against my seat. Dulcie gripped the wheel, staring straight ahead out the window.

"Something happened," she said.

"Yeah," I heard myself answer, although my voice sounded hollow. "We had an accident."

We got out to check the damage and met at the back of the car. "It's nothing," Dulcie said, as we studied the medium-sized dent on the fender. It was nothing to us, anyway; the car was too old and beat-up for us to feel protective of it.

Behind me, I heard the door of a van slide open. I hadn't thought about the people who'd hit us, hadn't even noticed if they'd bothered to stop. I started to wave them off. They didn't need to get out, apologize, dig around for the insurance information they probably didn't have. But when I turned, there were four or five men in front of me. They were standing very close. They were young. I was beginning to think that Dulcie and I should just get back into our car and drive away, when the van's engine cut out and a tall guy wearing a hooded sweatshirt called back toward it, "Yo, Darren! Turn it on, you motherfucker!"

His cursing seemed to make his friends nervous. Two of them looked at their feet. One hopped up and down like a fighter getting ready for a bout. Someone was saying, "Shit, shit, shit," over and over again. Then I heard "Do it, do it!" and a short, wide kid with a shaved head and glow-in-the-dark stripes on his sneakers pulled out a gun and pointed it at my face. It didn't look like the guns in movies. Dulcie screamed.

"Don't shoot. Please don't shoot us!" Her voice was so high it sounded painful, as if it were scraping her throat.

"Your keys!" the tall one shouted. "Give us your motherfucking keys!"

Dulcie threw the keys on the ground at their feet. "Please! I don't have any money!"

"I'll get it," I heard myself say, as if I were picking up the tab at a bar. I was calm. I felt like I was underwater. Everything seemed slow and all I could hear was my own breathing. I reached into my back pocket and pulled out my wallet. I took out the bills and handed them over. The tall guy grabbed the money and ran back to the van, which made me feel better until I noticed that the kid with the shaved head was still pointing the gun at me.

That's when I got scared. As though someone had thrown a switch, all the sound returned, loud and close. I heard the cars roaring past on Sunset. I heard Dulcie screaming, "No! No! No!" I heard an argument erupt between two of the guys. "Get in their car! Get in their fucking car or I'll do you, too!" I grabbed Dulcie's hand, and I pulled her around the front of our car, crouching low, so I could feel the heat of the engine under the hood. The van revved up. I stood, bringing Dulcie up with me, and there, on the driver's side, no more than three feet from me, was the kid with the shaved head. He had the gun in one hand and Dulcie's keys in the other. I could see sweat glistening over the pimples on his face.

"Hey!" he said, looking confused. "What the fuck?"

Then it was as if I skipped a few minutes of my life, because the next thing I knew, Dulcie and I were racing down a side street toward the porch lights of some bungalows. We didn't look back to see if we were being followed. Sometimes Dulcie held my hand, sometimes we were separated by the row of parked cars. We had no idea where we were going.

After the police and their questions, and their heartfelt assurance that there was nothing at all they could do for us, we took a cab back to our apartment in Silver Lake. Dulcie was worried because the crack heads—that's what the police called them—had our keys, and our address was on the car registration. But the police had told us that the carjackers wouldn't come after us—that kind of thing almost never happened.

Still, Dulcie couldn't sleep, so we sat up all night while she went over what had happened—she'd seen the van on the street earlier, but hadn't it been in front of us, not behind? Why had they chosen our car, our sorry, broken-down mutt of a car? How close had we come to being shot?

"We saw them," she said. "We know what they look like."

"They weren't killers. They were thieves. There's a difference, I guess," I said.

"No," she said, twisting her straight

STEFAN BANZ, "I BUILT THIS GARDEN FOR US (VAMPIRE)" (1997)/ARS FUTURA GALERIE, ZURICH

brown hair around her finger so tightly the tip turned white. "It doesn't make sense."

"It doesn't. But it happened."

Dulcie needs things to be exact. You have to explain yourself clearly when you're around her, so she's probably a good teacher. For a minute I wondered whether she wished we had been shot, just for the sake of logic.

She'd done this after losing the baby, too, going over and over what she might have done to kill it. Had she exercised too much? Not enough? Had she eaten something bad? She wanted an answer, and she needed to blame someone; if that person turned out to be her, that would still be better than having no one to blame at all. A few days after the delivery, a hospital social worker called to check on her. She reassured Dulcie that what had happened hadn't been her fault. It was a fluke thing, the woman said. She used the word "flukish."

"I should have noticed them tailing me," Dulcie said now. "How could I not notice a car that close?"

"Don't do that," I told her. "Don't think about what could have happened."

"I have to think about it," she said. "How can you not think about it? We were this close," she said, holding her fingers out like a gun and aiming at my chest.

I drove Dulcie's car to work the next day. When I got home that night, Dulcie had moved the mattress from our bed into the living room, where it lay in the middle of the floor, the sheets spilling over onto the carpet. She'd taken a personal day to recover from the holdup. Her eyes were red, and she looked as though she'd been crying all afternoon.

"It's the rat," she said. "He's back."

A month earlier, a rat had burrowed and nested in the wall behind our bed. Every night, it scratched a weird, personal jazz into our ears. We told the landlord, and he said he would get on it right away, which meant: You'll be living with that rat forever, and if you don't like it there're ten other people in line for your apartment. I checked around the house to make sure the rat couldn't find a way inside. I patched up a hole underneath the sink with plywood and barricaded the space between the dishwasher and the wall with old towels. After Dulcie was sure that there would be no midnight visitor eating our bananas, she was O.K. with the rat. We even named him—Mingus.

She wasn't O.K. with it anymore.

"He's getting louder. Closer. Like he's going to get in this time," she said.

"He can't get in. There's no way."

"Well, I can't sleep in that room."

"It's a small apartment, Dulcie." The living room was smaller than the bedroom, and the mattress nearly filled it.

"I can't do it, Charles. I can't."

"All right. We can sleep anywhere you want," I said.

"I want to sleep in the living room. And I want you to change the message on the answering machine," she said. "It has my voice on it. It should have a man's voice."

"You're worried about the rat hearing your voice on the machine?"

"Don't make fun of me, O.K.? Those guys know where we live."

Later that night, I discovered that she wanted to sleep with all the lights on.

"I want people to know we're home," she said. "People don't break in if they think you're there."

We were lying on the floor on our mattress. She felt tiny, so delicate that I would crush her if I squeezed too hard or rolled the wrong way.

"You don't mind, do you?" she said. "About the light. Is it too bright?"

She'd let me throw one of my shirts, an orange one, over the fixture hanging from the ceiling. It gave the room a muffled, glowy feel.

"No," I said. I kissed her forehead. She didn't turn to me. Since the baby, we've had a hard time getting together.

Dulcie sat up again. "Maybe it's a bad idea," she said. "Maybe a thief will see the light on at 4 A.M. and think that we're actually out of town. I mean, who leaves their light on all night when they're home?"

"No one."

The New York Times
crawford

"You know," she said, "I saw in a catalogue once that you could buy an inflatable man to put in a chair by your window. Or in your car. You could put him in the passenger seat if you were driving alone."

She looked at me, but I didn't know what to say. To me, driving with a plastic blowup doll in the seat next to you seemed very peculiar.

"Lie down," I said, stroking her back beneath her T-shirt. Her skin was smooth and warm.

She lay down next to me. I turned over on my stomach and laid my hand across her chest. I liked the feel of the small rises of her breasts, the give of them.

Dulcie's milk had come in two days after the delivery. The doctor had warned her that this would happen and had prescribed Valium in advance. I came home from work and found Dulcie, stoned, staring at her engorged breasts in the bathroom mirror. I'd never seen anything like it. Her breasts were like boulders, and her veins spread out across them like waterways on a map. Dulcie squeezed one nipple, and a little pearl of yellowish milk appeared. She tasted it.

"It's sweet," she said. "What a waste."

For the next two days, she lay on the couch holding packs of frozen vegetables against each breast. Sometimes we laughed about it, and she posed for a few sexpot pictures, with packs of peas pressed against her chest like pasties. Other times, she just stared at the living-room wall, adjusting a pack when it slipped. I asked her if her breasts hurt, and she said yes, but not in the way you'd think.

I slid my hand off Dulcie's chest, turned back over, and stared at the T-shirt on the light fixture.

"Did you know," she said, "that when you're at a red light the person next to you probably has a gun in his glove compartment?"

"Defensive driving," I said, trying for a joke.

"Statistically speaking, it's true. Until yesterday, I never thought about how many people have guns," Dulcie said. "Guns in their cars, guns in their pocketbooks when they're going to the market, guns . . . "

A fly was caught between the light and my T-shirt. I could see its shadow darting frantically back and forth until, suddenly, it was gone.

The next evening, as I was driving home from work, someone threw an egg at my car. I thought it was another holdup. I sucked in so much air that I started to choke and almost lost control. Two kids then ran by my window. One was wearing a Dracula mask and a cape. The other one had on a rubber monster head and green tights. I'd forgotten it was Halloween.

Dulcie takes holidays pretty seriously, and when I got home I expected to see a cardboard skeleton on the door, and maybe a carved pumpkin or two. Usually, she greets the trick-or-treaters wearing a tall black witch hat that she keeps stashed in a closet the rest of the year. When she opens the door, she makes this funny cackling laugh, which is kind of embarrassing but also sweet. She's so waifish, there's not much about her that could scare anybody. But when I got home and climbed the outside stairs to our second-floor apartment, there was nothing on our door and the apartment was dark.

"What are you doing with all the lights off?" I asked when I got inside. She was sitting at the kitchen table, her hands folded in front of her as if she were praying.

"Shut the door," she said. "A whole pack of them just came. They must have rung the bell five times."

"They want their candy."

"We don't have any."

"Really? You didn't buy any?"

"Charles, we don't know who any of these people are," she said slowly, as if I were six years old. "I'm not going to open my door to perfect strangers."

"They're kids."

"What about the ones who come really late?" she asked. "All those teenagers. They're looking for trouble."

I sat down and reached across the table for her hands. "It's Halloween, Dulce. It's just kids having fun."

"Plenty of people aren't home on Halloween. This is just going to be one of those places where nobody's home."

The doorbell rang.

"Dulcie—"

"Sh-h-h!" She hissed at me like a cat.

"This is ridiculous." I got up.

"Please!" she called out after me.

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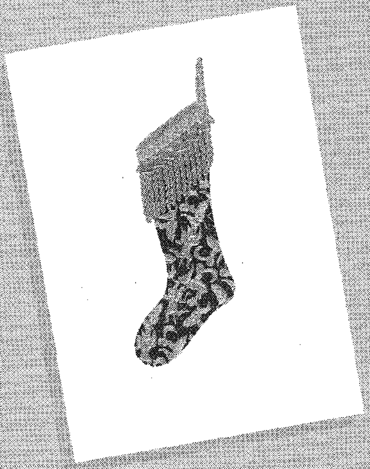

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The bell rang again. I grabbed a box of cookies from the shelf and went to the door. A little kid was walking away, but he turned back when he heard the door open. He was six, eight years old. An old man I recognized from the neighborhood, maybe his grandfather, stood a few steps behind him.

The boy wore a cowboy outfit—a fringed orange vest over a T-shirt with a picture of Darth Vader on it, jeans mashed down into plastic cowboy boots, and a holster sliding down over his narrow hips. He took a gun out of the holster and waved it around in the air.

"Bang," he said, without enthusiasm.

"You got me," I answered, putting my hands to my chest and pretending to die.

"It's a fake gun," the boy said. "No real bullets."

"You mean I'm not dead?" I tried to sound amazed, and I got a smile out of the kid.

The grandfather said something impatiently in another language, Russian or maybe Armenian.

"Trick or treat," the boy said quietly. He held out a plastic grocery sack with his free hand.

I looked into the bag. There were only a few pieces of candy inside. Suddenly, the whole thing made me sad. I offered my box of mint cookies.

The boy looked back at his grandfather, who shook his head. "I'm only allowed to have it if it's wrapped," the boy said to me.

I felt like a criminal. "We didn't have a chance to get to the store," I said, as the boy holstered his gun and moved off with his grandfather.

When I went back inside, Dulcie was standing in the middle of the dark living room, staring at me. Three months after the baby died, I came home from work and found her standing in that same place. Her belly underneath her T-shirt was huge, much bigger than when she'd actually been pregnant. For one crazy second, I thought that the whole thing had been a mistake, and that she was still pregnant. I felt a kind of relief I had never felt before. Then she lifted her shirt and took out a watermelon from underneath it.

A group of kids yelled "Trick or treat!" below us. They giggled. Someone said "Boo!" then there was a chorus of dutiful "thank you"s. I heard small feet pound up the rickety wooden stairway to the second-floor apartments. I walked over to Dulcie and put my arms around her.

"We can't live like this," I said.

"I can," she said.

Dulcie went back to work three days after the carjacking. I dropped her off at school in my car, and she arranged for one of her teacher friends to give her a lift home. I took it as a good sign, her returning to work. She complains about the public-school system, all the idiotic bureaucracy she has to deal with, but she loves the kids. She's always coming home with stories about cute things they did, or about how quickly they picked up something she didn't think they'd understand the first time. She was named Teacher of the Year last spring, and a couple of parents got together and gave her this little gold necklace. Her school's in a rough part of Glendale. The necklace was a big deal.

She was home when I got off work, sitting on the couch. She waved a piece of pink paper in the air.

"What's that?" I said.

"We're not allowed to touch the children anymore," she said.

"What are you talking about?"

She told me that a parent had accused a teacher of touching his daughter in the wrong way. Social Services came in, the works. When they finally got around to questioning the girl, she told them the teacher had just patted her on the back because she answered a question right.

"Now the district's in a panic—they don't want a lawsuit every time some kid exaggerates. So, no touching the students."

"That's nuts," I said. "Those kids need to be hugged every once in a while. They probably don't get enough affection at home."

"That's a racist generalization, Charles," she said. "Most of the parents try hard. They love their kids just as much as you and I would."

Neither of us said anything. Dulcie hadn't brought up the idea of our having kids since we'd lost the baby. She had just stepped on a grenade, and I was waiting through those awful seconds before it explodes.

"This is a fucked-up town," she said finally.

I wasn't sure what had made her say this. The school thing? The carjacking?

"Maybe if we turn on the TV we'll catch a freeway chase," I said.

"Or a riot."

"Or a celebrity bio."

She started laughing. "That's the real tragedy," she said. "The celebrity bio."

We laughed some more. When we stopped, neither of us knew what to say.

"I'm not racist," I said, at last.

"I know. I didn't mean that."

"I may be prejudiced against celebrities, though."

She squeezed out a smile. It was worth the stupid joke.

The next Saturday, Dulcie called an exterminator. She'd decided that we should pay for one out of our own pocket, because she'd read that some rats carry airborne viruses.

"People died in New Mexico," she said. "Children, too."

It turns out that the exterminator you call to get rid of bugs is not the kind you call to get rid of a rat. There's a subspecialty—Rodent Removal. Our rodent remover was named Rod. Rod the Rodent Remover. I was scared of him already.

When he came to the door, he was wearing a clean, pressed uniform with his name on it. "Rod," I said. "Thanks for coming."

"It's really Ricardo, but I get more jobs as Rod. Ricardo is too hard for most people to remember. You have a problem with rats?" he said, helpfully.

"Yeah. In here," I opened the door wider and led him into the apartment. "It's not really *in* the apartment, but we hear it from in here."

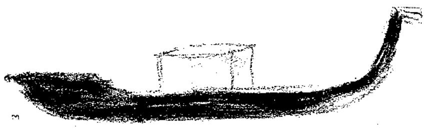
If Ricardo thought it was strange that the mattress was on the living-room floor, he didn't say anything. Dulcie was waiting for us in the bedroom.

"It's there," Dulcie said, pointing to a gray smudge where the head of our bed frame met the wall. "He's in there."

Ricardo went over and tapped the wall with his knuckle. Dulcie held her breath. There was no sound from the rat.

"They usually leave the house during the day," Ricardo said.

"How does he get in?" Dulcie says.



Ricardo raised his finger toward the ceiling. "Spanish tile roof. Very pretty, but bad for the rat problem," he said. "They come in through the holes between the tiles."

"So there's nothing we can do?" Dulcie asked, alarmed.

"We can set a trap in the wall through the heating vent there," Ricardo said, pointing to the one vent in our entire apartment, which was, unhelpfully, in the hallway outside our bedroom.

"Then he'll die in the wall?"

"It's a bad smell for a few days, but then it goes away," Ricardo said.

I could see that none of this was making Dulcie feel any better.

"Or I can put a trap on the roof," Ricardo said.

"Do that," Dulcie said, quickly.

"O.K.," he said. "Now we have a plan."

He reached into his pockets and took out two yellow surgical gloves. Dulcie was horrified, the gloves confirming her suspicions about disease. But Ricardo smiled pleasantly. This was a guy who dealt with rats every day of his life, and it didn't seem to faze him.

"Why do they come inside?" Dulcie said, as we followed Ricardo toward the door. "The rats. Why do they live in the walls? There's no food there."

"To keep warm," Ricardo said. "Sometimes to have their babies."

He smiled and gave us a courtly nod as I let him out. When I turned back, Dulcie was still staring at the closed door, her hand over her mouth.

"It's just a rat," I said. I touched her shoulder. She was shaking.

A month after the baby died, the mailman delivered a package that I had to sign for. We don't get a lot of packages, so it was an event. The box was from a company called La Tierra. The name sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it; I was about to call back into the apartment for Dulcie when I remembered. La Tierra was the name of the company that cremated the baby.

"What is it?" Dulcie said, from behind me. "Who was at the door?"

I turned around. This will kill her, I thought.

"What is it?" she said again, holding out her hand.

I had no choice but to hand it to

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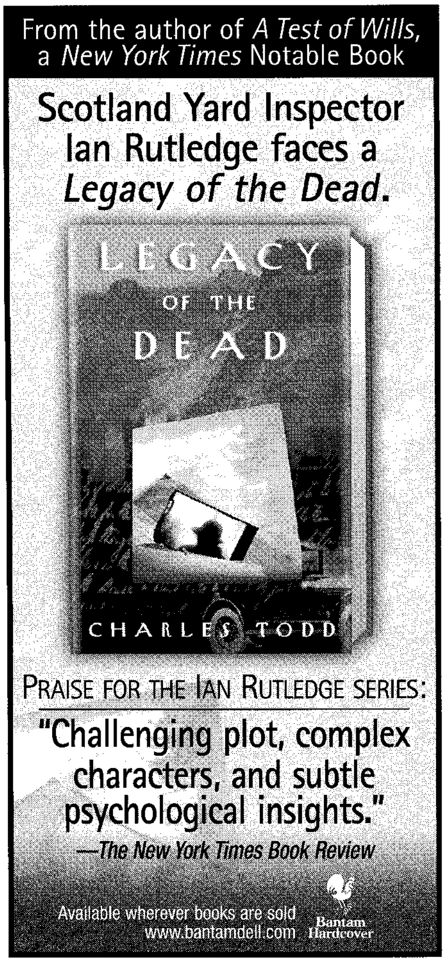

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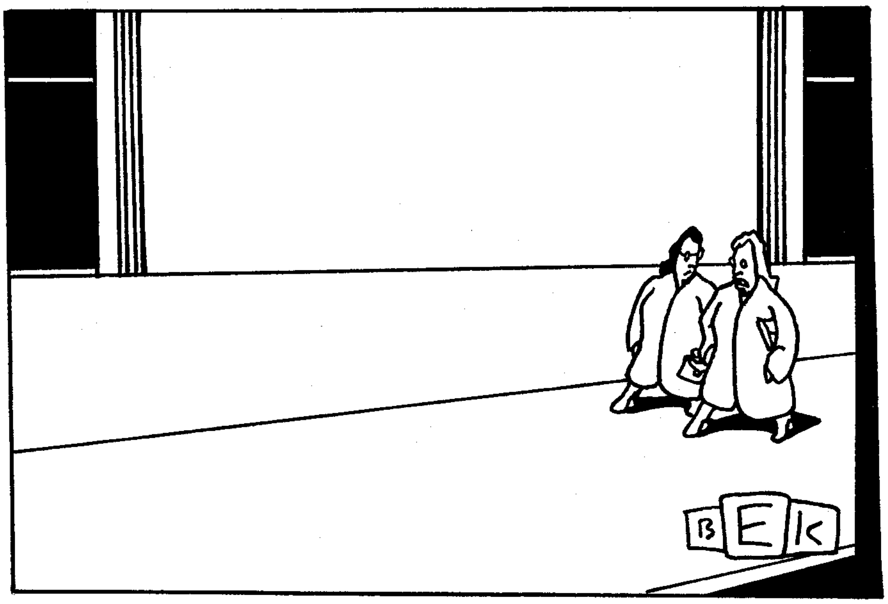

"We met cute, but we didn't continue cute."

her. She looked at it. Her face crumpled. "It's so light," she said, finally.

I went to put my arms around her, but she stepped back. Then she started laughing. Her laughter became the kind of giggling you can't turn off. She bit her lips and clenched her teeth, but the giggles kept coming back, as if they were tickling her insides in order to get out.

"You probably thought it was something from your mom," she said, through her laughter. "Or some freebie from a computer company. Oh, my God," she said. "Can you believe this is our life?" I smiled, but it was that weird, embarrassed smile you offer when you feel left out of a joke.

We decided to take the ashes to the beach and scatter them on the water. We drove out to the Ventura County line, to a beach called El Pescador. You have to climb down a steep hillside to get to it, and there's usually no one there, especially in the off season. We parked and scrambled unsteadily down the trail. We were so busy concentrating on not falling that we didn't see the ocean until we were at its level. We both got quiet for a moment. The water was slate gray, pocked by the few white gulls that every so often swooped down to the surface and then rose up again. There were no boats in the ocean, only a couple of prehistoric oil derricks in the distance. "I think we should do it now," Dulcie said.

We opened the box. Inside was some Styrofoam with a hole gouged out. Nestled inside that hole, like a tiny bird, was a plastic bag filled with brown dust. There could not have been more than a tablespoonful. I took the bag and handed the box to Dulcie. Then I kicked off my shoes, rolled up my jeans, and walked out into the water. When I was calf deep, I opened up the bag. I waited for something to happen, for some gust of wind to kick up and take the ashes out to sea. But the day was calm, so I finally dumped the ashes into the water at my feet. A tiny wave moved them toward the shore. I worried that the ashes would end up in the sand, where somebody could step all over them, but then I felt the undertow dragging the water back toward the sea.

"I think that's the bravest thing I've ever seen a person do," Dulcie said as I came out of the water.

As we headed back to the trail, she picked up a smooth stone and slipped it into her pocket. Halfway up the path, she took the stone out and let it drop to the ground.

A week after the holdup, the police called. They had found our stolen car. Once the kids run out of gas, the officer explained, they usually abandon the car rather than pay for more. He gave us the address of the car lot, somewhere in South Central.

"Go early in the morning," the officer warned. "Before they get up."

" 'They'?" I asked.

"You a white guy?" the policeman asked.

"Yeah."

"You want to be down there before wake-up time. Trust me."

Dulcie said it was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Everybody expected things to be bad, so people made them bad. She saw it at her school. The kids who were expected to fail, well, they blew it every time out, even if they knew the work cold.

Still, we took the officer's advice and went down to the lot at seven in the morning. I admit I was nervous, driving through those streets. You like to think you're more open-minded than that, but I guess I'm not. I kept thinking about drive-by shootings and gangs and riots and all the things you read about, thinking, Those things don't happen near where I live, so I'm O.K.

We found our car. It was a mess. It had been stripped of everything; even the steering wheel was gone. There was every kind of fast-food wrapper scattered on the back seat, and French fries and old hamburger buns on the floor. You get hungry when you're high. It wasn't worth the price of towing, so we signed it over to the pound and left it there.

As I drove Dulcie to work, I told her the police had asked us to come identify the suspects in a lineup.

"But they'll know it was us who identified them," she said. "They know where we live."

"They were busy getting high. I don't think they were memorizing our address."

"I don't even remember what they looked like. It was dark."

"Once you see some faces, it might come back."

"Charles, don't make me do this. Don't make me!" she cried.

"I'm not going to make you do anything. Jesus. What do you think I am?"

She didn't answer me. I dropped her off at the school. She got out and walked toward the front door, then turned to wave at me, as if it were any regular day, as if we weren't living like some rat trapped in our own wall.

I took the day off. I'd already used up my sick days, and I knew we couldn't throw away the money, but I thought I'd go crazy if I had to be nice to a customer or listen to some technician talk about his bodacious girlfriend or his kid's troubles in school.

I didn't have a plan. I picked up a paper and got some breakfast at a hipster coffee shop on Silver Lake Boulevard. There were a lot of tattooed and pierced people eating eggs and bacon; they looked as though they were ending a night, not beginning a day. I tried to concentrate on my paper, but nothing sank in. Then I got back into my car. I ended up driving along Vermont into Griffith Park, past the roads where guys stop to cruise, all the way up to the Observatory. I parked in the empty lot and got out.

The Observatory was closed; it was still early. I was trying to think of something to do with myself when I saw a trail heading up into the hills. The path was well worn; on the weekends, it was usually packed with tourists and families making a cheap day of it. But that morning I had it to myself. I passed outcroppings where people could stand to look at the view. I wanted to walk. I walked for hours. I felt the sun rise up, and I saw the darkness that covered the canyons lift, as if someone were sliding a blanket off the ground.

By the time I stopped, others were on the trail—runners, or people walking their dogs, some kids who were probably playing hooky. I looked out over the canyon and thought about how I could go either way: I could stay with Dulcie and be as far away from life as a person could be, or I could leave.

I had been looking forward to the baby. I didn't mind talking to Dulcie about whether or not the kid should sleep in bed with us, or use a pacifier, or how long she would nurse him, or any of the things she could think about happily for days. I got excited about it, too. But I had no idea what it meant, really. What was real to me was watching Dulcie's body grow bigger and bigger, watching that stripe appear on her belly, watching as her breasts got fuller and that part around her nipples got as wide and dark as pancakes. When the doctors took the baby out of her, they handed him to me without bothering to clean him up; I guess there was no point to it. Every inch of him was perfectly formed. For a second, I thought

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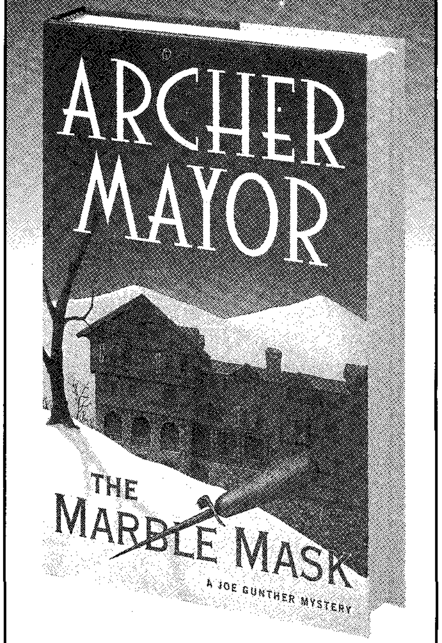

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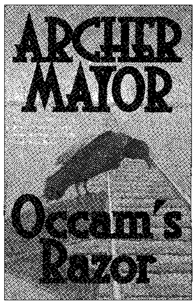

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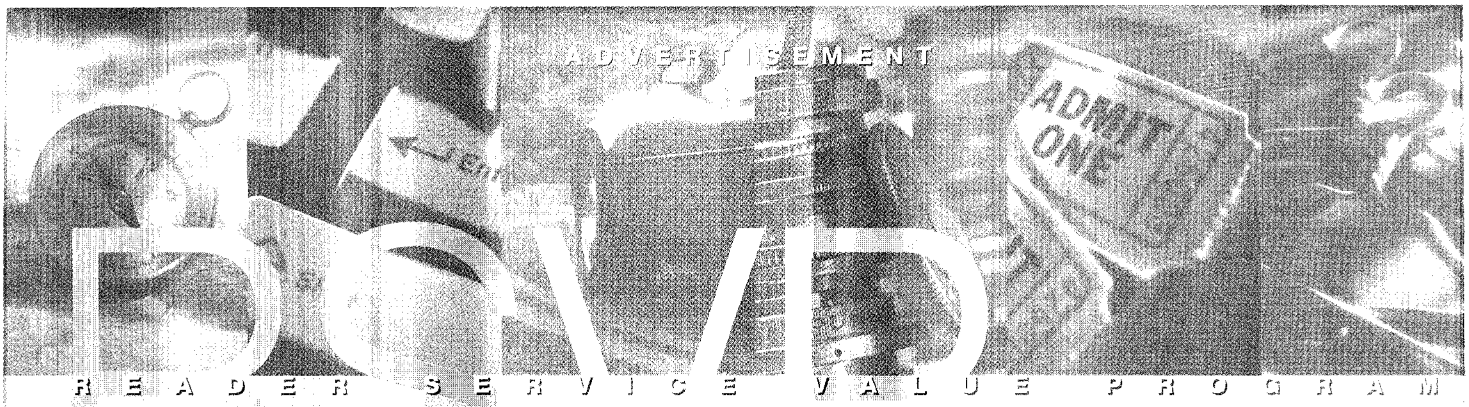

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he would open his eyes and be a baby. It didn't look like anything was wrong with him, like there was any reason for him not to be breathing and crying and getting on with the business of being in the world. I kept saying to myself, This is my baby, this is my baby. But I had no idea what I was saying. The only thing I truly felt was that I would die if something happened to Dulcie.

A runner came toward me on the trail. His face was red, and sweat had made his T-shirt transparent. He gave me a pained smile as he ran past. He kicked a small rock with his shoe, and it flew over the side of the canyon. For some reason, I looked over the edge for the rock. What I saw from where I stood was amazing to me. I saw all kinds of strange cactus plants—tall ones like baseball bats, others like spiky fans. There were dry green eucalyptus trees and a hundred different kinds of bushes I couldn't name. I heard the rustle of animals, skunks or coyotes, maybe even deer. There was garbage on the ground and in the bushes—soda cans, fast-food drink cups, napkins with restaurant logos on them. I saw a condom hanging off a branch, like a burst balloon. For some reason, the garbage didn't bother me. For all I knew, this was one of those mountains that was made of trash, and it was nature that didn't belong. Maybe the trash, the dirt, the plants, bugs, condoms—maybe they were all just fighting for a little space.

I got home before Dulcie. I dragged the mattress back into the bedroom. I took my shirt off the light fixture in the living room and put it in the dresser. When Dulcie came back, she saw what I had done, but she didn't say anything. We ate dinner early. I watched a soccer game while she corrected some papers. Then I turned off the lights in the living room, and we went into the bedroom. She knew my mind was made up, and she climbed into bed like a soldier following orders. When I snapped off the bedside lamp, she gave a little gasp.

We lay quietly for a while, getting used to the dark. We listened for the rat, but he wasn't there.

"You think the traps worked?" she said.

"Maybe."

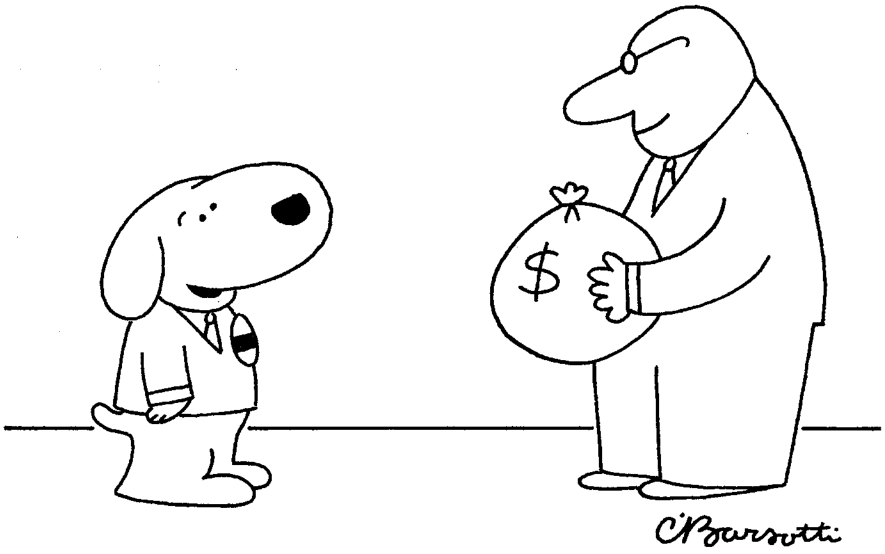
I reached for her. At first it was awkward, as though we were two people who had never had sex with each other. Truthfully, I was half ready for her to push me away. But she didn't, and, after a while, things became familiar again. When I rolled on top of her, though, I felt her tense up underneath me. She started to speak. "I should go and get—"

I put my fingers on her mouth to stop her. "It's O.K.," I said.

She looked up at me with her big, watery eyes. She was terrified. She started again to say something about her diaphragm. I stopped her once more.

"It's O.K.," I repeated.

I could feel her heart beating on my skin. I could feel my own heart beating even harder. We were scared, but we kept going. ♦



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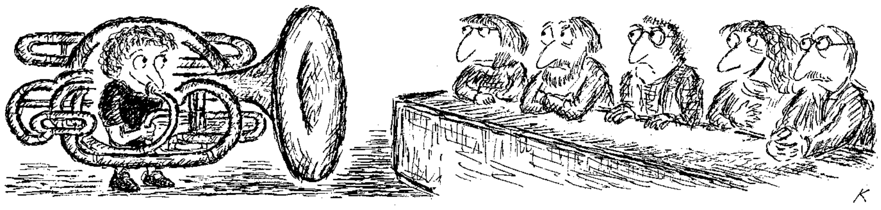


BOOKS

KEEPING SCORE

Where'd you go, Joltin' Joe?

BY JOHN GREGORY DUNNE

"Show me a hero," Scott Fitzgerald wrote in his notebooks, "and I will write you a tragedy." Not always.

"The Hero's Life" is the subtitle of Richard Ben Cramer's "Joe DiMaggio" (Simon & Schuster; $28), and the irony could be set to music. Between 1936 and 1951, Joe DiMaggio played in 1,736 regular-season and fifty-one World Series games for the New York Yankees, none of which Cramer saw. This suggests just one of the difficulties of writing a biography of a sports legend, especially one like DiMaggio, whose every waking moment from his retirement to the day of his death was spent cosseting, protecting, and funding that legend, maximizing it as a product and shutting out anyone, like Cramer, whose interrogations might cause its stock to decline. Baseball players are what they do. They survive in the ether of instinct and reflex, where the difference between success and failure is measured in the blink of an eye. Until their skills atrophy, they get a pass from the realities of life. In major-league clubhouses there is an inchoate sense that ballplayers are more skilled in their profession than sportswriters are in theirs, that being a jock is a higher calling than being a jock sniffer. The history of these lives is written in box scores, videotapes, old clips, failing memories, and, most important, the literature of anecdote, where truth is the first, and an acceptable, casualty.

As it certainly was in the life of Joe DiMaggio. He grew up in San Francisco, one of nine children of an immigrant Sicilian fisherman who rarely made more than a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month, spoke only a Sicilian patois, and could not read English or Italian. Joe, the fourth son, hated the water and the smell of fish. He was at best an indifferent student, whose favorite subject was playing hooky, and who, at fifteen, dropped out of high school. Glove, bat, and ball offered him an escape from the fishing fleet (as it did his brothers Vince and Dominic). On a baseball field, he could parse the game the way Hemingway could parse a sentence. (No stranger to fame and its rewards himself, Hemingway was occasionally a part of DiMaggio's entourage.) When he was eighteen, after a three-year career on the San Francisco sandlots and in its semi-pro leagues, making odd change as a street-corner newsboy, he was signed by the San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League. In 1933, his rookie year, he hit in sixty-one consecutive games, a hint of things to come. His name was misspelled "DeMaggio" in the papers (without complaint from Joe), but already he was a creature of melting-pot fables: "His papa wanted him to fish, but DeMaggio only loved baseball . . . the poor Italian boy who learned to hit with a broken oar for a bat."

In 1936, after three dominating seasons in the Coast League, DiMaggio, then twenty-one, reported to the Yankees, a team with five future Hall of Famers already on its roster—Lou Gehrig, Tony Lazzeri, Bill Dickey, and the pitchers Red Ruffing and Lefty Gomez. It was, however, a team that had not won a pennant in four years. DiMaggio was the missing piece, and at spring training, in St. Petersburg, he went, Cramer writes, "from newsboy to national star without apprenticeship." Before he had played an inning in the major leagues, one sportswriter called him "the replacement for Babe Ruth," and the New York *World-Telegram* prepared an eight-part ghostwritten autobiography. "My name is Joseph Peter DiMaggio, Jr.," the opening paragraphs declared, although his name was actually Joseph Paul. "Thus Joe attained his first major league record," Cramer writes. "Youngest player ever to get his own name wrong in his autobiography." He needed a nickname, and it had to fit, as Larruping Lou never really did for Gehrig, absent, as it was, the beauty and brevity of The Babe. Briefly, he was the Roamin' Roman (forget his Sicilian roots) and the Wallopin' Wop; *Life* reported that he spoke English without an accent and did not smell of garlic. If DiMaggio took offense, it did not melt his icy self-control. In the dugout, and with those he permitted to get close, he was the Dago, or Daig. Finally, a nickname stuck: the Yankee Clipper.

In his first four years as a Yankee, the team won four pennants and four World Series, and in 1939, with a .381 batting average and a .671 slugging percentage, he was named the American League's Most Valuable Player. His contract negotiations those first years were always a struggle. Yankee management did not hesitate to tell its mouthpieces in the press that DiMaggio was asking for outlandish raises at a time when the nation was fighting its way out of the Depression and much of the labor force was on a breadline. In the end, DiMaggio always caved; owners owned, players were chattel. Throughout his life, he was an injustice collector, sensitive to every slight, real and imagined; he never forgot and rarely forgave, and those Yankee executives who called him an ingrate for wanting his salary bumped more than they thought he deserved helped fuel the ferocity of the money grubbing that characterized his later years.

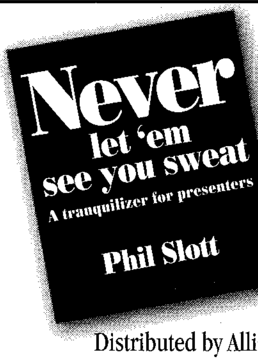
In 1941, at the age of twenty-six,

GLOBE PHOTOS

DiMaggio crossed the divide from star to icon. The vehicle was his fifty-six-consecutive-game hitting streak, which began at Yankee Stadium on May 15th and ended in Cleveland's League Park two months later, on July 17th. The streak was slow to creep up on the public consciousness, competing as it was with the harsh truths of the real world. There was a war going on in Europe; Lou Gehrig, just thirty-seven, died the day DiMaggio hit in No. 19. Then, suddenly, the streak reached critical mass. After the thirty-first game, DiMaggio attended the Joe Louis-Billy Conn heavyweight championship fight at the Polo Grounds, and received an ovation matching that of the two fighters. No athlete since the Babe had reached what Cramer calls "the colossal Otherness."

Throughout the American League, as DiMaggio approached George Sisler's modern record of forty-one straight and then Willie Keeler's pre-1900 record of forty-four, there were capacity crowds when the Yankees came to town; all over the country, radio stations carried updates of each at-bat, and strangers stopped one another in the street to ask how he was doing. There was, of course, the obligatory dying ten-year-old boy, whom Joe promised that he would get a hit the next day and break Sisler's record, with the implication in the press that a DiMaggio bingle was the ultimate medicine, a sure cure for the boy's diseased spleen. "You be listening to your radio tomorrow," the newspapers reported DiMaggio saying, "and hear me break that hitting record for you." The papers got the child's name wrong, and the fact that he died before the next game began and Sisler's record was broken was not news. As the streak hit fifty, DiMaggio was hoping to make it to fifty-seven straight, in anticipation of a possible promotional payday from Heinz 57 Varieties,

Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio were married for only nine months, but their union resonated permanently as a myth.



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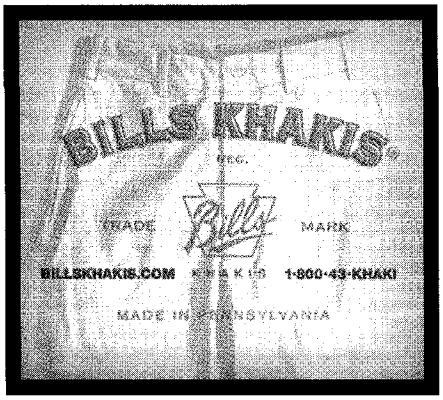

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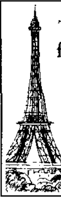
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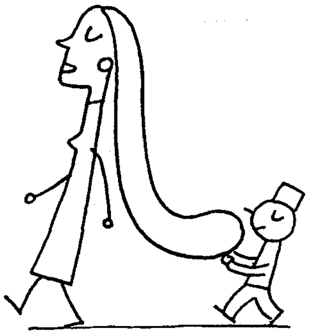
but he came up a game short. Incredibly, the day after he was stopped he began another streak, which lasted sixteen more games, so that he hit safely in seventy-two out of seventy-three consecutive games.

The streak bolted DiMaggio into the national myth machine, and New York, with its sentimental tabloid culture of heroes and bums, legends and fallen idols, was the perfect place for the myth to flourish. It was the city for the best, the biggest, the brightest, the toughest, a broken heart for every light on Broadway, how the mighty have fallen, the Little Flower, the Brown Bomber, the Merm, the city that never sleeps, thirty thousand gin joints, Harlem, Cab Calloway, Bill Basie, ribs and chicken wings at dawn, good evening Mr. and Mrs. United States and all the ships at sea, let's go to press. The beauty of New York was that New Yorkers believed it all, every sad story, every happy ending, and still do. Had DiMaggio played for St. Louis or Cleveland or Detroit, he would have been of no more significance than Stan the Man or Rapid Robert or Hammering Hank, and what fun would that be? St. Louis, Cleveland, and Detroit would always be "out there" in Saul Steinberg's American desert for New Yorkers, no better than the burbs.

It should be remembered that DiMaggio was baseball's last radio superstar. The beauty of radio is that, unlike television, it puts the listener into the mix. There are no highlight shows, instant replays, or let's-go-to-the-videotape features to show us what happened. Visual images speak to the visceral, while voices heard but not seen allow free play in the cineplex of the mind; when the Yankee broadcaster Mel Allen said, "DiMaggio to the wall . . . he's got it," the listener could pretend that he himself was making the catch with the Clipper's same loping ease. The print press in those prewar years was also not as adversarial as it became in the television era. Writers covering the Yankees, or any major-league team, learned to embellish, and certainly to look the other way after the game story was filed and the joys and companionship of the evening beckoned. The clubs, after all, paid for their meals, travel, and accommodations on the road, and were not reluctant to notify editors and publishers if a story or a reporter did not pass muster.

DiMaggio was brilliant with the press. It is conceivable that his lifelong reticence was predicated on an intuition that he was not very smart, was perhaps even dumb. His favorite reading deep into his years with the Yankees was the new Superman comic book that came out every Wednesday. Only by keeping his mouth shut could he attach to himself that sense of distance and dignity that was far more valuable for the burnishing of his image than an ability to ventilate on the New Deal or Hitler's invasion of Russia (which coincided with the thirty-fourth game of the hitting streak). He was, Gay Talese once wrote, "a kind of male Garbo." Few teammates were summoned into his private space, except rookies and lesser players, who were essentially caddies, running his errands, carrying his bags. He preferred the company of men who by taking a vow of *omertà* could sun themselves in his reflected glory, and he cultivated columnists who never deviated from the mantra that his classic and controlled perfection on the field illuminated his life off it. Chief among these cheerleaders was Jimmy Cannon, of the New York *Post*. Cannon refined the "Nobody Asked Me, But . . ." template that has been copied by generations of younger sports columnists, although none have done it quite so well. "Nobody Asked Me, But . . ." he would write. "Guys who address me as 'friend' have a hard time making me one. . . . Anyone who can drink whiskey out of a paper cup qualifies for Alcoholics Anonymous. . . . Why do all good pool players wear white-on-white shirts?" Cannon was a dude, a drinker, a bachelor, a night owl, and he would stay up late with DiMaggio, keeping him company. Anticipating C.C. Baxter in Billy Wilder's "The Apartment," Cannon



made his two-room suite at the Hotel Edison in midtown available to DiMaggio if he needed a place to get laid.

Like Jack Burden in "All the King's Men," trying to find out the secret of the incorruptible Judge Irwin, Cramer taps every plank in the wall that DiMaggio erected around himself and that protected him from inquiry. In the wall's hollow spots, Cramer locates the girls, finds the Mob guys, and behind the legend of grace and elegance on and off the field discovers a legend who in reality was more often than not graceless and inelegant. When he was new in town, DiMaggio was a regular at Polly Adler's Manhattan whorehouse. Adler was the most famous bawd of her time. She was discreet, paid off the right people, hired the best-looking girls, served expensive food and drink, catered to every recherché taste, and in her sunset years, when she was no longer running hook shops, wrote the best-selling memoir "A House Is Not a Home." Adler's girls plied their trade on satin sheets, and these were the cause of a DiMaggio complaint: they were so slippery that the Yankee Dipper's knees could not get traction. Adler immediately bought a set of plain cotton sheets, which were reserved for future visits and were known as DiMaggio's Sheets. They may be the only memento of his career that he did not later autograph and offer for sale.

Perhaps Cramer's most interesting revelation is how tight DiMaggio was with the Mob, both during and after his days with the Yankees. For Italian-Americans, he was a magnet of ethnic pride. This pride was shared by made men as well as by shoemakers and lawyers, doctors and politicians. Before the war, he spent a lot of time in Newark, in the company of Ruggiero (Richie the Boot) Boiardo, the boss of the First Ward, who disposed of suddenly dead enemies in a furnace-size outdoor barbecue at his mansion in Livingston, and Abner (Longy) Zwillman, the Jewish gangster who, Cramer writes, "put the 'organized' in organized crime." In 1939, when DiMaggio got engaged to Dorothy Arnold, a singer-dancer-actress-showgirl from Duluth, her four-and-a-half-carat emerald-cut-diamond engagement ring was a gift to DiMaggio from Richie the Boot. Around the American League, mobsters comped him in their clubs and got him girls. Bosses like Joe Adonis and Frank Costello knew it would be harmful to his reputation if they were seen in his presence, but they showed their respect and gratitude in other ways. A trust account was set up for him at the Bowery Bank. Every time DiMaggio appeared at a Mob joint, money was deposited in the account, every time he talked to a top guy, more money; it was not to be touched, and just sat there gaining interest. By the time he retired, in 1951, the account at the Bowery had multiplied to more than a million dollars.

DiMaggio's marriage to Dorothy Arnold was a disaster. Its single asset was a son, Joe, Jr., or Butchie, who served only to point up that his father was no more interested in being a parent than he was in being a husband. DiMaggio regarded women as property, like bats and gloves, and referred to them as "broads." A wife was a broad who was meant to stay at home, give up her career, if she had one, and not try to share the limelight with her famous husband. Nor was she to wear two-piece bathing suits or low-cut necklines, or complain when the man of the house continued his boys'-night-out existence with Hemingway and Toots Shor, with an occasional side trip with a broad to Jimmy Cannon's apartment at the Edison for what he liked to call "a good pump." The marriage did not survive the war, which Sgt. DiMaggio spent playing ball for various service teams, mainly in Hawaii. He did not contest the divorce, in part because Dorothy had put private detectives on his case who compiled a dossier of hotel rooms into which he had disappeared with pumpable women wearing the kind of clothes he would not allow his wife to wear.

He was thirty-one when he reported back to the Yankees in 1946, sullen that he had lost three years of big salary checks while in uniform. He was also beginning to break down physically; he had ulcers, his arm and his legs had started to go, and he spent long stretches in various hospitals. There were four more pennants, four more World Series rings, a third Most Valuable Player award, a magnificent comeback from heel surgery in 1949 (ending in a pennant-winning victory over the Red Sox in

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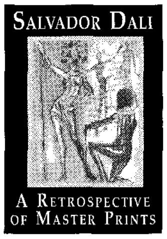
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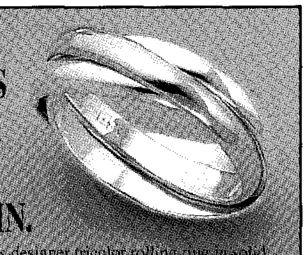

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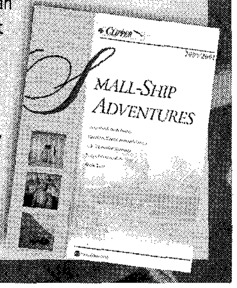

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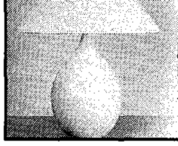

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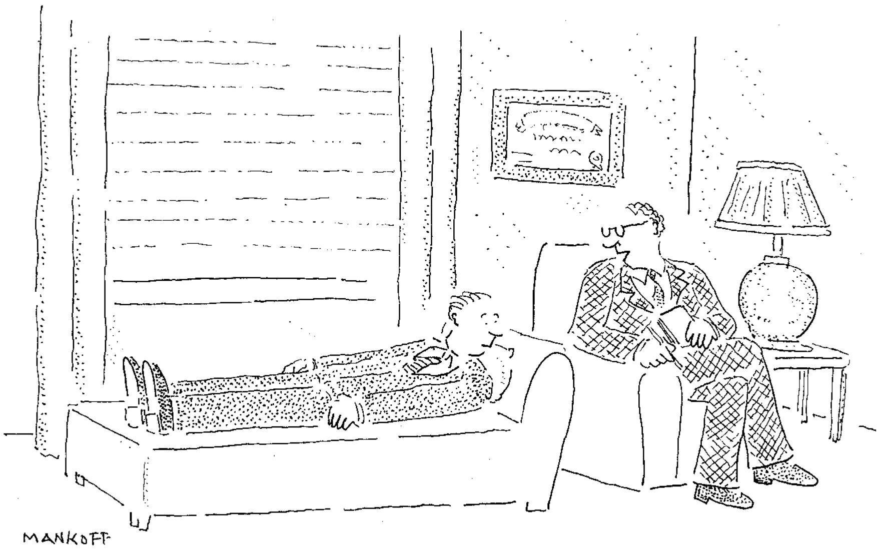
the last game of the season), baseball's first hundred-thousand-dollar-a-year contract, and a nineteen-year-old successor, Mickey Mantle, in the wings. DiMaggio had never been generous toward his competitors, and he genuinely resented comparison with his most eminent rival, Ted Williams, of the Red Sox, who hit .406 the year of the streak, in the process becoming baseball's last .400 hitter. Williams had never won anything, DiMaggio said, and "he throws like a broad." Finally, after a mediocre year in 1951, he retired. He was an ancient thirty-six, and ready to reap the benefit of the million-dollar pension fund his Mob benefactors had set up at the Bowery Bank.

A retired superstar is like a lion in winter, a long and very cold winter. He is the intimate stranger we think we know because of his celebrity. But his financial opportunities are limited to the decreasing value of his signature on memorabilia, and his psychic bank account is in constant overdraft. That DiMaggio managed to escape this fate can be attributed to his eye for broads. In Los Angeles for an exhibition game the year after his retirement, he saw a publicity photograph of a blonde in a halter and short shorts in a local newspaper, and, with the sexual imperialism he seemed to regard as his by divine right, he ordered a middle man to set up a meeting in a Sunset Strip restaurant. The blonde was two hours late, a mortal sin for a broad when dealing with a divinity like Joe DiMaggio. She was also not quite clear who he was (she had never seen a baseball game), but thought he dressed nicely, like a tycoon or a congressman. The blonde was Marilyn Monroe.

I think an argument can be made that DiMaggio's aura, and its hold on the national imagination, lasted as long as it did less because of his achieved image of nobility than because of Marilyn Monroe and later, after her death, Paul Simon. Sports, or more specifically the mythology of sports and athletic legend, is an opiate for half the American population: it is a guy thing that marginalizes women. Women, however, understood Marilyn, understood her place on the meat rack, empathized and sympathized with her. For women, DiMaggio was only a below-the-title supporting player in Marilyn's legend, no more than Nicky Arnstein when compared with such other lovers as John Kennedy and Arthur Miller.

It took a long time for DiMaggio to realize that Marilyn was as big a star as he had been, and in his retirement an even bigger one. He tried the same tactics he had with Dorothy Arnold: he wanted her to forfeit her career and not wear sexy clothes, but Marilyn was a star, not a fringe singer-actress-model, and was already in the thrall of her myth, even as she complained about it. When Marilyn died, Claire Boothe Luce had a fiercely deterministic take on her life: given her background, education, and emotional fragility, the movies, Luce suggested, far from killing her, had saved the star from the life of a quasi-hooker. Sex was really the only thing she and DiMaggio had in common. She was not stable, but she was smarter than he was, or at least had intellectual ambitions, and as her career flourished, he became to her what Toots Shor and Jimmy Cannon had been to him, a hanger-on, Mr. Marilyn Monroe. By now she had her own retinue of satellites—Paula Strasberg and the photographer Milton Greene—hitching their wagons to her star. When she and DiMaggio got married, in 1954, they went to Japan for their honeymoon, and then Marilyn, at the request of the American military, went by herself to Korea to entertain the troops stationed there; for the G.I.s, it was like a collective masturbation experience. "Joe, you never heard such cheering," she famously said when she returned to their honeymoon suite in Japan, and he famously replied, "Yes, I have."

This is one of those symmetrically perfect stories that attach themselves to legend, and might even be true, or so we would like to think. The marriage lasted only nine months. Imagine Joe DiMaggio on a Monroe movie set: the tall man trying to stay out of the way, smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee. He was extraneous, as he never had been on a baseball field, and his frustration sometimes boiled over. While Marilyn was doing exteriors for "The Seven Year Itch" in New York, she shot a scene in which she cooled herself over a subway grating, and her skirt, as the script demanded,



"O.K. What part of 'malignant regression and pathogenic reintrojection as a defense against psychic decompensation' don't you understand?"

• •

blew up over her head. There was take after take, her cotton panties exposed in every one, the flashbulbs from the still cameras aimed at her crotch outlining her pubic hairline. DiMaggio left the location in a rage, and that night he beat her up in their suite at the St. Regis Hotel. Three weeks later, after returning to Los Angeles to finish the film's interior shots, Marilyn filed for divorce. Fearful of more physical abuse, she moved into the studio to sleep, and DiMaggio was quietly barred from the lot. No door had ever been closed to the Yankee Clipper; one can assume it was an embarrassment greater than the divorce.

Until Marilyn's death in 1962, DiMaggio encouraged, and perhaps even believed, the delusion that they would get back together. They talked, they fucked, but reconciliation was never really in the cards. Marilyn belonged to a larger audience. In 1958, Paddy Chayevsky wrote an original screenplay, "The Goddess," a thinly disguised dissection of her legend; Chayevsky's DiMaggio surrogate was not a ballplayer but a retired, not overly bright former heavyweight boxing champion. Although DiMaggio inspired several theatrical and literary references ("Her skin is tender as DiMaggio's glove," the sailors in "South Pacific" sing about Bloody Mary, and Santiago, the fisherman in Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea," ruminates about "the great DiMaggio"), they don't approach the literary cottage industry the life of Marilyn provided. In 1973, Norman Mailer published his speculative biography, "Marilyn," and this year, Joyce Carol Oates's novel "Blonde" was nominated for a National Book Award. Eight years ago, Bill Morris, in his novel "Motor City," reimagined Marilyn's wedding day with DiMaggio: "The first thing Marilyn Monroe did on her wedding day was peroxide her pubic hair with a toothbrush." In the book, while their wedding license is being typed, she calls a friend, who asks how she feels. "I'm so happy," Morris's Marilyn says. "I have sucked my last cock."

DiMaggio never doubted that he was Marilyn's last and only true love, but while the marriage and the torch he carried before and after her suicide added sad shadows to his own iconography, they were not income-producing. With a vengeance, he went into the Joe DiMaggio business, and the Mob, as always, was there to help out. A meet-and-greet with DiMaggio at the 500 Club in Atlantic City was a two-thousand-dollar gig, and a golf game made him five. Sam Giancana, says Cramer, "was always good for a broad, or a payday, in Chicago." On

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October 25, 1957, DiMaggio and a friend went to the Warwick Hotel on the West Side to meet with three Cuban mobsters who wanted him to front a gambling operation in Havana. On his way to their room, DiMaggio and his friend stopped off to say hello to Albert Anastasia, the boss of bosses, who then went out to get a haircut at the Park Sheraton Hotel on Sixth Avenue. It was his last haircut. After Anastasia was shot to death as he sat in the barber chair, N.Y.P.D. detectives interrogated DiMaggio. The Cubans, he said, were baseball fans, he did not know who Anastasia was, and, when shown a photograph of Joe Adonis, he said he did not know him, although Adonis had helped set up his retirement account at the Bowery Bank.

Coincidence or not, DiMaggio became the pitchman for the Bowery Bank. There was nothing he would not sell. He got blocks of tickets to most sporting events, all of which he turned over for a profit. He wore his 1936 World Series ring, his first, but sold the nine others, and claimed that they had been stolen from the small apartment he kept in New York. He was always on the go, another day, another city, every stop a profit center. There was always a blonde; a former Miss America to whom he exposed himself in Paris claimed that his member was bigger than Milton Berle's. Everywhere there were the hangers-on, their alleged closeness to him their only growth issue, always ready to congratulate him on his perceptions, which ran along the lines of, as Gay Talese reported, "Men who ski must be doing it to impress a broad." He was the keeper of his own flame, guardian of his assumed image as nature's aristocrat, a role forever assigned him by Paul Simon's "Mrs. Robinson":

> Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio,
> A nation turns its lonely eyes to you.

Simon was evoking an age we wished to believe was simpler and better, even if it wasn't. In DiMaggio's case, it was a sentimental notion: nature's aristocrats do not beat up women, nor do they pal around with Sam Giancana, Frank Costello, Joe Adonis, and Longy Zwillman, who gave DiMaggio three suitcases full of cash that he—Zwillman—could call in if he needed to take a quick powder. Zwillman never did; he was murdered or committed suicide, which left DiMaggio six hundred thousand dollars richer.

In the making of a national myth, DiMaggio's failures and shortcomings were revised into virtues, and, at his death, it was the familiar litany of the hero's uncomplicated grace and elegance that prevailed in the editorials and in the newspaper special editions. While Cramer's reporting is prodigious, he never really solves the problem of how to tell the story: it needed an Olympian detachment, but he chose a demotic, locker-room style. He re-creates conversations he never heard, and tries to goose the narrative with a kind of Damon Runyon argot that makes him sound like Nathan Detroit: "Ruth was making eighty large a year." There are fancy verb forms ("vehemed" is used at least twice) and unfortunate forays into vaudeville Italian: "But the old man didden talka too gooda de English." Still, it is a sad story Cramer tells, and an unpleasant one. Sad because the vultures who attached themselves to the superannuated DiMaggio positively ennobled the mobsters by comparison. The scavengers treated him like carrion, while the bosses took care of him because he made an Italian heritage something to be proud of. Unpleasant because it is difficult to write a five-hundred-and-forty-six-page biography about a hostile, misogynistic, avaricious, and mean-spirited man. What DiMaggio did best he did for only three hours in the spring and summer afternoons of his young manhood, or, to be exact, for only thirteen of his eighty-four years. He outlived the glow afforded him by Marilyn Monroe. He was too self-centered to appreciate what Paul Simon had given him. "I just did a Mr. Coffee commercial," he told Simon when the latter introduced himself in a restaurant. "I haven't gone anywhere." The aging athlete who does a Mr. Coffee commercial would be wise to consider A. E. Housman:

> Eyes the shady night has shut
> Cannot see the record cut,
> And silence sounds no worse than cheers
> After earth has stopped the ears. ♦

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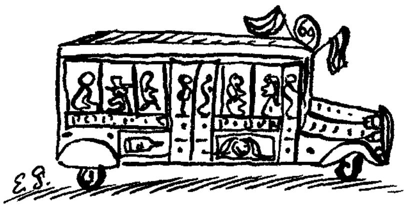
BRIEFLY NOTED

The Golden Age, *by Gore Vidal (Doubleday; $27.50).* Most of Vidal's novels chronicling the growth of the great American empire have terse one-word titles: "Burr," "Lincoln," "1876." By that standard, "The Golden Age" is positively flowery. Indeed, it represents Vidal's method in full bloom, using a large cast of fictional and historical characters to reënact the main events of the middle of the century, from America's ambivalence toward the Second World War to the bomb and Communism—and that's just the beginning. Throughout, Vidal relies on a mix of drably staged events and coruscating gossip, and since he is documenting an epoch that hardly lacks for documentation, readers will be grateful that he has leaned toward the latter: even if the novel sometimes errs on the side of chatter, it's undeniably exhilarating to gain access to the back rooms and boudoirs in which modern American society was designed.

The Green Suit, *by Dwight Allen (Algonquin; $22.95).* These interconnected stories chart the course of Peter Sackrider, a moderately handsome, fairly talented, somewhat wealthy Kentuckian who moves North to become a writer. He makes a career of sorts publishing in quarterlies and writing for Sunday newspaper supplements; we watch him evolve from a passive teen-ager during the Vietnam years to a restless middle-aged man who leaves his wife and child in search of something he can't quite put his finger on—a home for the imagination, perhaps. Allen writes about Peter's apparently ordinary life with such pleasing, perceptive assurance that *it* becomes revelatory.

Don't Tell Anyone, *by Frederick Busch (Norton; $25.95).* The twenty-fourth book by this prolific, consistently impressive novelist is a collection of sixteen stories and a novella that probe the depths of the American family. As usual, Busch weds a dark, morally ambiguous world view to superbly composed prose, whether he is writing about a mother coming to terms with her daughter's violent depression or a father's failure to protect his grown son from emotional injury. Busch also experiments subtly and persistently with the form itself; almost every story has a surprising shape that insures its place in the reader's memory.



The Case of Doctor Sachs, *by Martin Winckler, translated from the French by Linda Asher (Seven Stories; $27.95).* A provincial doctor's dedication, intensity, and rebellious attitude toward the medical establishment of France is rendered vividly and movingly here, mostly through a patchwork of accounts from his patients' points of view. The author's experimental narration heightens the novel's immediacy, doing full justice to the messiness of the body and the variety of its afflictions. Included among these is the urge to write; there is even an uproarious, scatologically focussed sample of the fictional doctor's fiction.

After the War, *by Alice Adams (Knopf; $25).* Adams, who died last year, grew up in North Carolina, and the South—with its azaleas and mimosa, its generosity and its failures of will—is the central character of her final novel, which picks up where her previous book, "A Southern Exposure," left off. Cynthia Baird, a transplanted Yankee, is floating from one affair to another while her husband, Harry, is off fighting in Europe; her housekeeper, Odessa, the moral center of this particular universe, keeps turning out her ham biscuits; the local girls, including Melanctha Byrd, who is heading North to Radcliffe (as Adams herself did), are growing sly and eager to leave town. There are so many subplots—about race relations, sex, politics, and adolescence—that it's as if Adams wanted both to capture an era entirely and to make things, this once, come out right. The result is lovely, tender, and a little hokey, like that moment just before the birthday candles are blown out.

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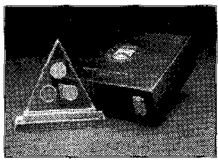

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BOOKS

THE KUROSAWA KID

A prodigy searches for a father in Helen DeWitt's first novel.

BY A. S. BYATT

Genius went out, as a subject for novels, with the Romantics, and the problems of the very intelligent are not felt to be urgent in a populist age like ours. We are more anxious about what will happen to the uneducated and unqualified who will be superannuated by machines and become disaffected. So Helen DeWitt is taking risks in writing a fat novel about a highly educated single mother of a boy who may well be a young Mozart or an Einstein—or may, as she recognizes, be heading for the kind of nervous collapse produced by the hothouse education of John Stuart Mill. "The Last Samurai" (Talk Miramax; $24.95) is in fact a triumph—a genuinely new story, a genuinely new form, which has more to offer on every reading but is gripping from the beginning of the first.

Sibylla is the daughter of brilliant American failures. Her father, a convinced Darwinian atheist, went to a bad theological college to please his minister father, missed a Harvard scholarship, was an expert gambler, and ended up running motels. Her mother was a brilliant mad musician whose immigrant Jewish father made all his brilliant mad musical children into accountants on the ground that only genius guaranteed success in music. Sibylla herself is an accomplished linguist, who believes that the American novel should be written in all languages, not just in English; she gave up Oxford classics after spending fifty hours on a boring German text known to forty-nine other people in the world, and now earns a pittance in London by typing fish-breeding and pet-keeping magazines. Ludo, her son, was conceived during a one-night stand with a slick and successful travel writer whom she calls Liberace, as a comment on his style. He had a vulgar passion for Lord Leighton and bad art criticism. She went to bed with him because it was more bearable than the conversation. She is not a patient woman.

Ludo picks up grammars—and math and physics and logic—from the age of three with terrifying intensity and ease, most convincingly dramatized. Sibylla teaches him—he makes her teach him—ancient Greek, Arabic, Icelandic, and Japanese. They watch Kurosawa's "The Seven Samurai" over and over. They travel around the Circle Line with a pushchair full of books and dictionaries. They do this to keep warm, as they cannot afford to heat the house. Ludo marks verb forms in the Odyssey with different-colored markers. Passersby make various crass remarks, about which Sibylla—*not* a patient woman—is waspish. Ludo learns and learns. He picks up street Japanese and is quicker at understanding the samurai than his mother. School is a comic and terrible failure.

Helen DeWitt

LARA TOMLIN

At this point, Ludo takes over the narrative from his mother. He develops from a precocious eight-year-old into a wise eleven-year-old. He desires to have a father, to know who his father is. Being a resourceful child, he finds out, and visits. He is dreadfully disappointed. Sibylla has written that she hopes with the samurai to have given him seventeen fathers—eight characters, eight actors, and Kurosawa. Ludo has secretly read her manuscript. He tells himself that a "good samurai will parry the blow" and sets out to invent or acquire a father, or trick one into acknowledging him. He visits seven—including a Nobel laureate, a great classicist, an investigative journalist, an artist, and a Japanese pianist whose ideas of perfection of performance and technique sit as hopelessly in the real world as Sibylla's. All these fathers have stories, all gripping, all rapidly and lightly told, several including relationships with small boys from other cultures who are damaged, protected, and threatened.

The ambition of this novel is large, and every reading reveals more subtleties. It is a novel about heredity and environment. Ludo (whose name has to do with play, with chance, with the aleatory) is clearly the genetic descendant of his gambling, musical, grammar-obsessed maternal family. He is equally clearly not the spiritual child of Liberace—except that he shows a surprising cunning and resourcefulness. The form of this novel both embodies and studies the tug between determinism and chance. Ludo's maternal heredity is his fate, in a Darwinian sense. His genes determine his nature. His birth is the product of crude chance, or luck, bad or good. Necessary order and contingency coexist. There are patterns—math, grammars, and music—and there is the recurrent theme of gambling, the luck of the dice or of the cards, which is also a mathematical form, but one of hazard. The seven samurai are variations on a theme, and so are the chosen fathers—each with overlapping stories, each with alternative connections to Sibylla and her preoccupations, nature, and predicament. She and one of the best of the fathers are suicidal. Ludo is determined to save her if it can be decently done. He has learned from her to believe that suicide is a course of action we have a right to, usually.

"The Last Samurai" is also about heroism—the Japanese warriors, the Greek heroes, Malory's perfect knights, and the heroes of the sagas. The new novel, exploring new representations of cause and effect, fate and choice, shifts interest from the Self, the character, to the story, the exemplary life. It also, characteristically, deploys the interlocking of many stories in a web, which makes chance begin to look like necessity. Is Ludo making his own fate or fulfilling it? I noticed on the second reading the beautiful symmetry of the fatherless boy reading the Odyssey going round

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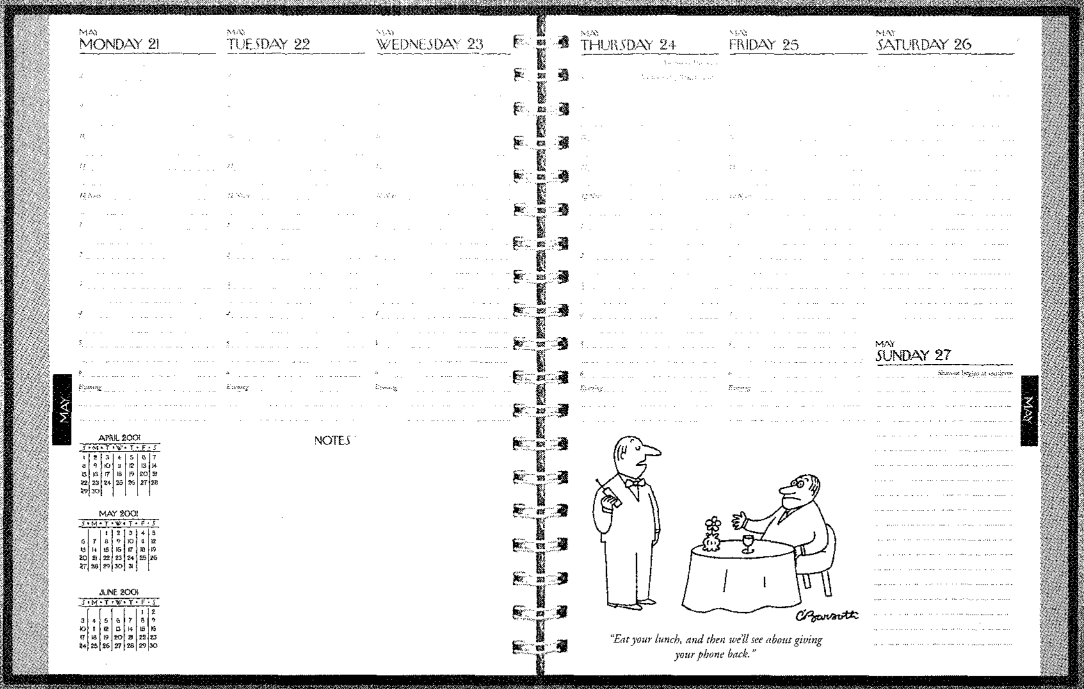
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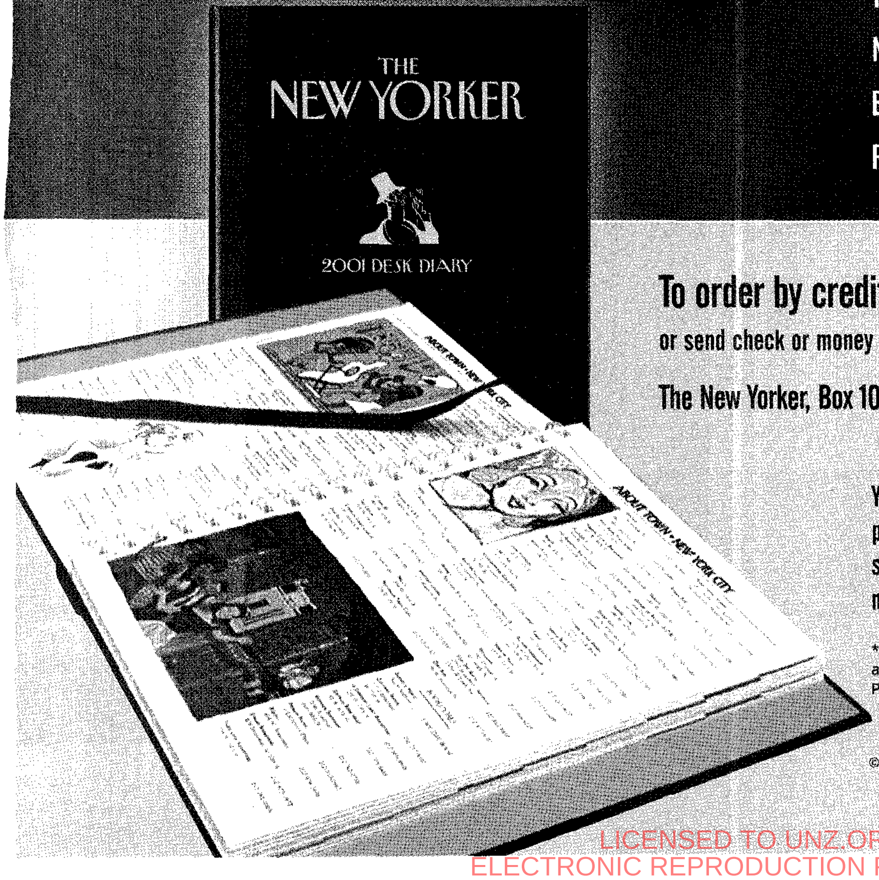
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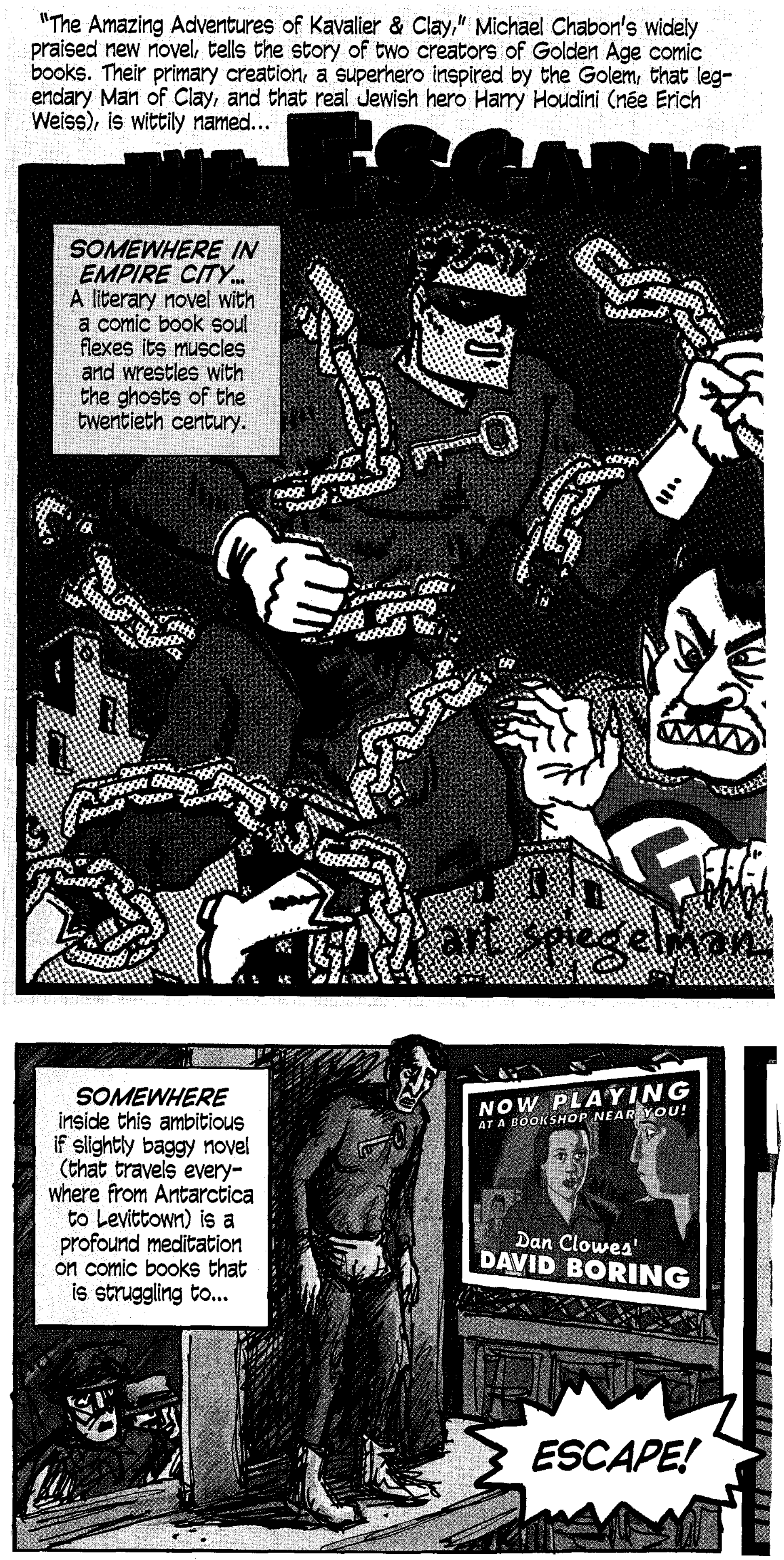
and round the Circle Line—the *periplum*, as Pound kept saying of the circle of the Mediterranean around which Odysseus journeyed in search of his wife and child.

Pound is much to the point here, for Helen DeWitt's novel is, like "The Cantos," a peculiarly American bricolage of all cultures. It is not at all a politically correct multicultural object, nor is it the kind of pared-down international novel, like those of the early Ishiguro, that achieves its accessibility to all cultures by eschewing detail that refers densely to any particular one. It is a multilingual, multistoried, myriad-minded novel—a novel of the Internet age, where everyone has access to all grammars, all dictionaries, all information, where math and physics and philosophy and fairy tales hum across the same screen. I have a Japanese friend who describes "The Seven Samurai" as a Japanese Western (the ambiguity in the word "Western" is intentional), with faint disapproval. But Sibylla—like Helen DeWitt—wants to live in a world where Finnish mixes with Greek, and English is informed by Chinese. Kurosawa's film is Japanese, and it is a kind of Western.

"The Last Samurai" reminds me of another first novel I admired recently—David Mitchell's "Ghostwritten," which is also set in the whole world, also concerns both art and science, and is also constructed around coincidence, chance, and storytelling. The curious thing in both cases is that, though it is the ideas that drive the novels and, after the ideas, the elaborately constructed plot, the characters are more human, more simply important to the reader, than in many finely constructed, primarily psychological studies. They have the life and presence of characters in epics and tales. "The Last Samurai" is funny and tragic and intriguing and over the top and perfectly controlled. But it is also—in an ordinary and undeniable way—very moving. The voice of the child crying for more information, wrecking Sibylla's work, rest, and thought process, is familiar to every mother, whatever the child is demanding. The love between the mother and son is clear, and complicated, and accurately felt. It is exciting for the future of the novel that a writer can do all the basic things readers need—from "Peter Pan" to the Odyssey, from "Bleak House" to "The Crying of Lot 49"—and do something new with the form of the tale itself. ♦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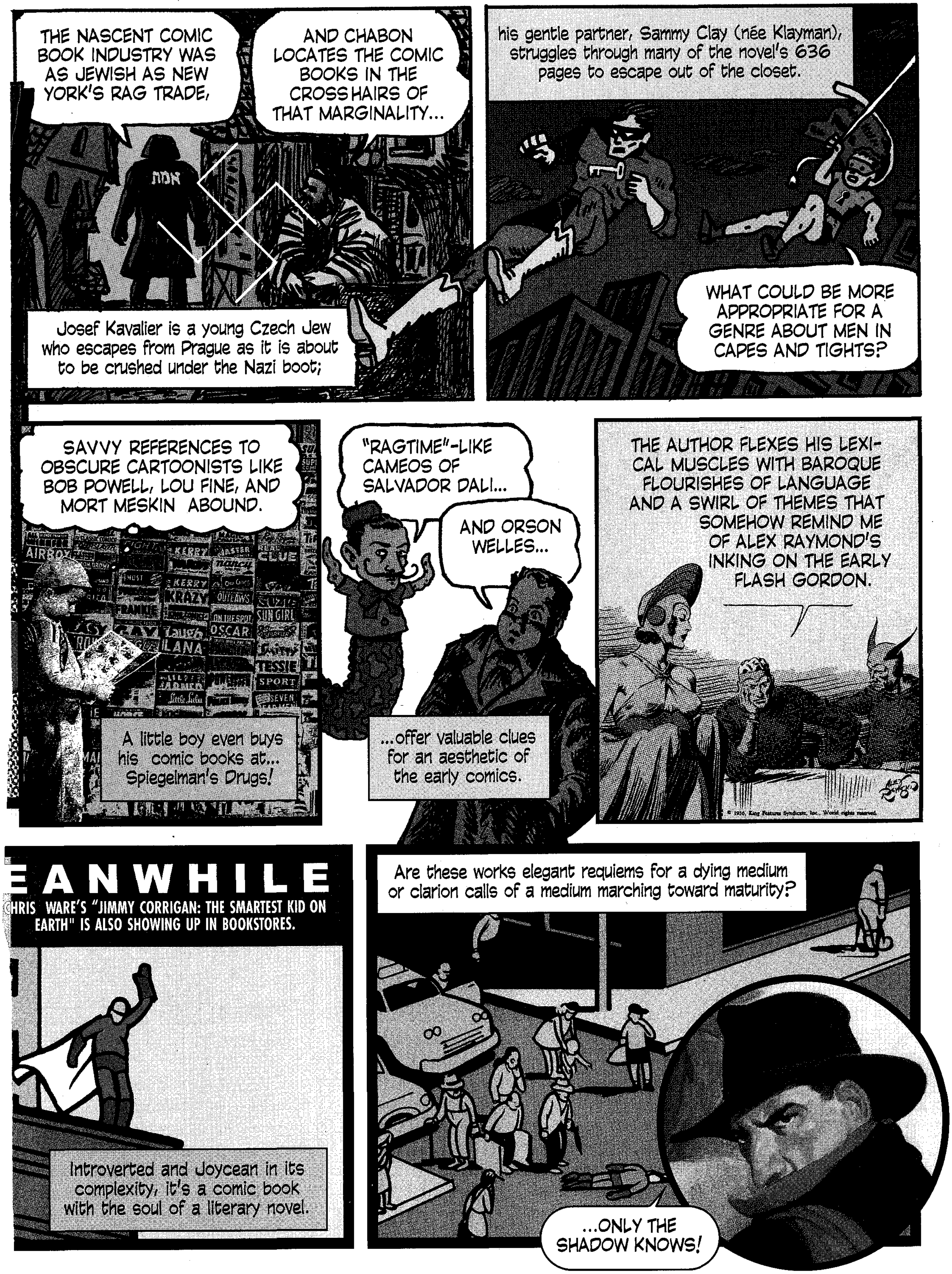
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POP MUSIC

BEYOND THE PALE

Radiohead gets farther out.

BY NICK HORNBY

In Michael Lydon's absorbing biography of Ray Charles, the author observes that our musical habits changed with the advent of rock and roll. We were no longer interested purely in song. Lydon points out that the big TV music show of the fifties, "Your Hit Parade," suffered a fatal drop in ratings because audiences lost interest in bland, invariably "white" cover versions of the current Top Ten; we wanted to listen to the record itself. This was entirely understandable; it's hard to imagine wanting to hear anyone but Elvis singing—and Scotty Moore playing—"Baby Let's Play House." In retrospect, however, it's also easy to see that this transfer of allegiance brought with it an awful lot of trouble and disappointment. We had, in effect, decided to trust the artist, not the material; within a couple of decades, rock fans would be trotting off to Sam Goody to buy Lou Reed's "Metal Machine Music."

"Metal Machine Music," you may recall, consisted of sixty-odd minutes of feedback noise, and was utterly contemptuous of anyone who had ever shown an interest in Reed's work. If there was justice in the world, the record would have resulted in a large fine and possibly even a short prison sentence for its creator; instead, it has achieved something approaching cult status among Reed's devotees—the customer reviewers on Amazon.com are perversely approving. One says, "Best to say this is Reed's cynical anti-art statement to his fawning public," before awarding it the maximum five stars. Another declares flatly, "The greatest album made by anyone—Ever!" (The same writer also claims to hear feedback versions of Neil Diamond's "You Don't Bring Me Flowers" and Alicia Bridges' disco classic "I Love the Nightlife" hidden away on songs two and four of the record, even though neither of these songs existed until years after "Metal Machine Music" was released, in 1975.) Heaven forbid that Reed should not be able to profit from what sounds like an afternoon's idleness. In the end, every burp that finds its way onto a rock recording simply becomes part of the narrative of a rock star's career. Neil Young produced the screeching "Arc"—another feedback classic, although metal machine noise can't always be blamed for career lows. Bob Dylan crooned his way through "Self Portrait," apparently to amuse himself and annoy his fans. These albums are not bad music by talented people. They're

Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood, Phil Selway, Thom Yorke, Ed O'Brien, and Colin Greenwood. Photograph by Nitin Vadukul.

scary scenes in a gripping movie, a twist in an endlessly fascinating bio-pic—that's how "legends" like Dylan and Young get away with it.

It is only fair to say that Radiohead's new album, "Kid A," is nowhere near as teeth-grindingly tedious as "Metal Machine Music." It has its attractive and compelling moments—every so often something gorgeous floats past—and those Radiohead fans who are hell-bent on loving it will not be reduced to convincing themselves that they can hear future Ricky Martin hits buried somewhere in the passages of ambient drone. It does, however, start from the same premise as the Reed album: it relies heavily on our passionate interest in every twist and turn of the band's career, no matter how trivial or pretentious. You have to work at albums like "Kid A." You have to sit at home night after night and give yourself over to the paranoid millennial atmosphere as you try to decipher elliptical snatches of lyrics and puzzle out how the titles ("Treefingers," "The National Anthem," and so on) might refer to the songs. In other words, you have to be sixteen. Anyone old enough to vote may find that he has competing demands for his time—a relationship, say, or a job, or buying food, or listening to another CD he picked up on the same day. He may also find himself shouting at the CD player, "Shut up! You're supposed to be a pop group!" (The music critics who love "Kid A," one suspects, love it because their job forces them to consume music as a sixteen-year-old would. Don't trust any of them.) I suspect that people who have been listening to rock music for decades will have exhausted the fund of trust they once might have had for "challenging" albums. "Kid A" demands the patience of the devoted; both patience and devotion become scarcer commodities once you start picking up a paycheck.

There is nothing wrong with making albums for sixteen-year-olds, but Radiohead's previous efforts had more inclusive ambitions. The first one, "Pablo Honey," may have been patchy, but it contained one song, "Creep," that gave voice to everyone who has ever felt disconnected, alienated, or geeky—just about anyone who has ever used rock music to get through the day. "I'm a creep, I'm a weirdo," the singer Thom Yorke piped with unnerving sincerity. "What the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here." The genius of the song was its mournful anguish, and the fact that it struck a chord with real creeps—people locked away in penal institutions, for instance—served only to underline the brilliance of the conceit. It wasn't the lyrics of "Creep" that were significant but the thrilling little chukka-chukka guitar noise that foreshadowed the song's chorus. Radiohead's second album, "The Bends," was a masterpiece. In recent years, only Nirvana has come close to matching its flair with the old-fashioned dynamics of rock. "The Bends" had it all: electrifying tunes, real drama, and a band that seemed equally committed to both the enormous climactic guitar riffs of the title track and an assortment of spooky, pretty ballads. With "The Bends," Radiohead found its voice, and, despite the album's conventional trappings, it turned out to be unique: no other contemporary band has managed to mix such a cocktail of rage, sarcasm, self-pity, exquisite tunefulness, and braininess.

Its successor, "OK Computer," had some extraordinarily lovely tracks—the operatic "Lucky," the menacingly slinky "Karma Police," the hymnal "No Surprises." Its centerpiece, however, was the six-minute opus "Paranoid Android," a rather clumsy chunk of dystopia (Radiohead, political and anti-consumerist, is big on dystopia) with symphonic ambitions—which is what rock critics always say when there are quiet bits bolted shakily onto noisy bits. Older listeners may have heard "Paranoid Android" and been uncomfortably reminded of experiences they would rather forget—such as sitting in a field somewhere and nodding appreciatively to the sounds of King Crimson or Emerson, Lake & Palmer, best-forgotten seventies bands whose songs and solos were way too long. Still, "OK Computer" sold millions, and was voted the best album of all time by the readers of the English rock magazine *Q*.

Who knows what earned Radiohead its huge audience? One could argue that it was the longer, chancier parts of "OK Computer," but

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it seems just as likely that it was the more straightforward songs that really connected. Whatever it was, Radiohead now has a fervent audience who will give the band all the license it needs. We have been served plenty of notice to the effect that Radiohead is bored with its enviable facility for writing melody and well-structured songs; in various interviews, the band has warned us that "Kid A" would be markedly different from its predecessors, and apparently all sorts of blips and splodges and squeaks, fragments of a bellicose work in progress, have been emanating from Radiohead Web sites.

It comes as something of a relief, then, when you put "Kid A" into the machine and hear the fruity (and beautifully recorded) sound of an electric piano, playing a sweet, churchy intro. "Hey! I can handle experimentalism!" you think, but your confidence is immediately knocked flat by the lyrics of the first song, "Everything in Its Right Place," which consists mostly of the lines "Yesterday I woke up sucking a lemon" and "There are two colors in my head." The title track is an inconsequential piece of sci-fi soundscape—five minutes of treated voice and eerie synth noises. "The National Anthem" is an unpleasant free-jazz workout, with a discordant horn section squalling over a studiedly crude bass line. Only once on the album, I think, does Radiohead come close to creating anything that electrifies in the way that great chunks of the previous two albums do: "Idioteque" is a twitchy, hypnotic nursery rhyme that you can imagine twenty-third-century children with two heads and green skin singing in their underground kindergarten. A whole album of that and "Kid A" could have been something—something you wouldn't want to dig out too often, true, but something strikingly ominous.

What is peculiar about this album is that it denies us the two elements of Radiohead's music that have made the band so distinctive and enthralling. For the most part, Thom Yorke's voice is fuzzed and distorted beyond recognition, or else he is not allowed to sing at all; and Jonny Greenwood's guitar, previously such an inventive treat, has been largely replaced with synths. One explanation may be the band's enthusiasm for the sort of music it has recently been listening to—Messiaen, apparently, and Charles Mingus, and all sorts of things that don't sound anything like "Creep." The result is that there's no room for anything approaching conventional pop music, and though the band might want to show us its impressive breadth of taste, it's hard to understand why we should be any more interested in Radiohead's version of Charles Mingus than we would be in its versions of Joyce or Fassbinder—many of these influences seem semi-digested, at best, and there is very little on "Kid A" that is remotely memorable.

Another explanation is that this is a band that has come to hate itself—or, at least, the gurgling echo of itself that one hears in the countless baby Radioheads that have been spawned in the past few years. Radiohead is as imitated now as Nirvana was a decade or so ago, and though this kind of imitation must be depressing and irritating (imitators are able to photocopy the surfaces but not the soul and the guts and the intelligence), to retreat from its formerly accessible self in this way seems a failure of courage. In any case, it's hard to be yourself when everyone else is trying to be you, too.

Radiohead reportedly spent more than a year recording one song that it eventually decided not to include on "Kid A." The album is morbid proof that this sort of self-indulgence results in a weird kind of anonymity, rather than something distinctive and original. (The CD pamphlet, incidentally, contains a splenetic attack on Tony Blair, who may feel entitled to ask himself how a band that spends a year failing to come up with an album track would have responded to the Kosovo crisis or the floundering Northern Ireland peace process.) Nobody is asking Radiohead not to grow, or change, or do something different. It would be nice, however, if the band's members recognized that the enormous, occasionally breathtaking gifts they have—for songwriting, and singing, and playing, and connecting, and inspiring—are really nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, they might even come in handy next time around. ♦

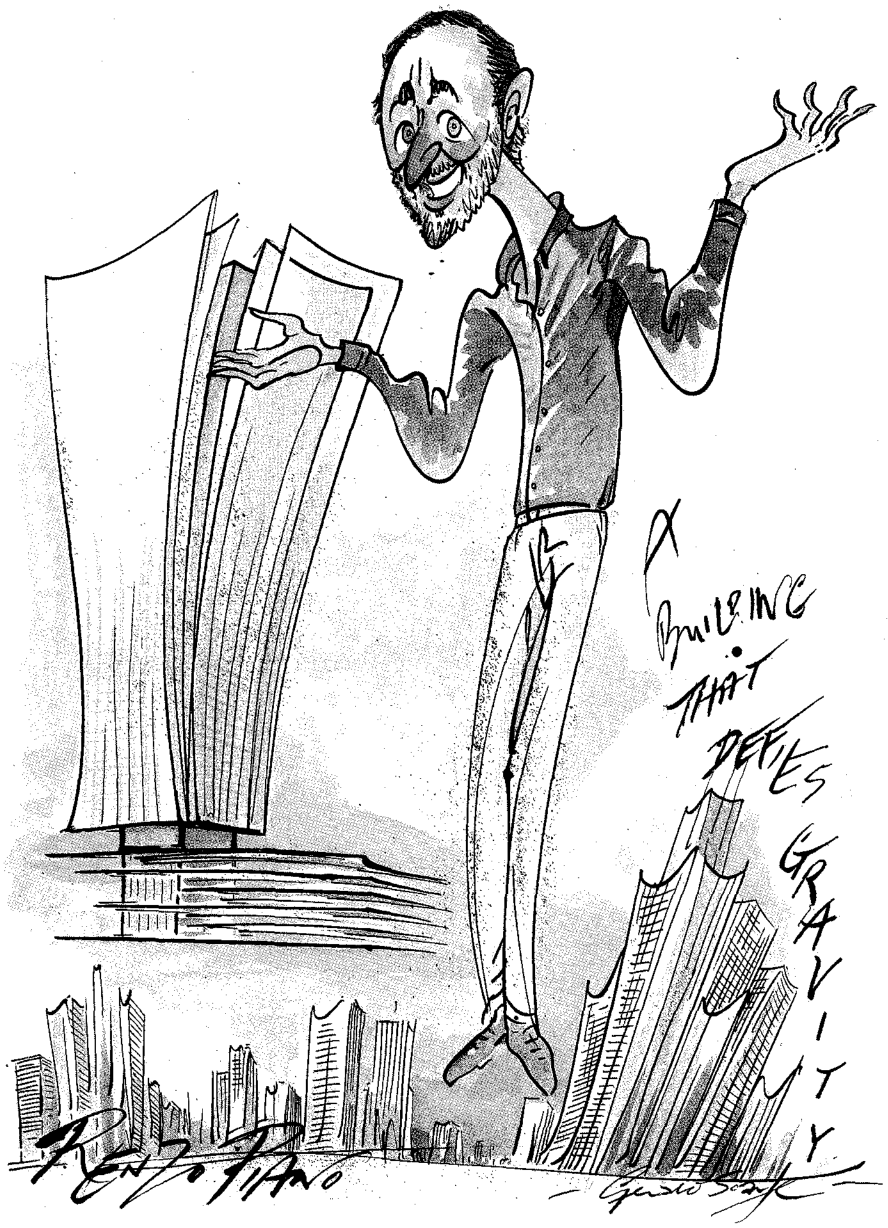
THE SKY LINE

DREAM HOUSE

How did the Times come to commission such a radical new building?

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

On the morning of September 27th, the architect Frank Gehry, who is based in Santa Monica, telephoned Michael Golden, the vice-chairman of the New York Times Company, who was overseeing one of the year's most important design competitions. For several months, the Times had been in the process of selecting an architect to build a new headquarters, at West Fortieth Street and Eighth Avenue, not far from the paper's longtime home, on West Forty-third Street. Gehry and one of his favorite colleagues, David Childs, of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, had joined forces, and even though three other world-famous architects had also been invited to submit designs, Gehry and Childs were fairly sure that they had the inside track. Their design, a deft blend of the wavy, curvy structures Gehry is known for and the skyscrapers Childs specializes in, had not only pleased Golden but had excited Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., the chairman of the Times company, and his father, Arthur (Punch) Sulzberger, the recently retired chairman. Joseph Lelyveld, the paper's executive editor, had visited Gehry's warehouse-like office in California, and the two men got along well. The paper's architecture critic, Herbert Muschamp, had long ago put his money on Gehry as the most important architect of the era. What could be more natural than the greatest architect for the country's premier newspaper?


A BUILDING THAT DEFIES GRAVITY
Renzo Piano
Gerald Scarfe

GERALD SCARFE

As Golden and Gehry chatted, Golden explained that if the two architects got the contract they would have to sign an agreement obligating their two firms to open a joint office in New York, and Gehry would have to commit to being there at least one day a week. Gehry, who has an almost naïve desire to deal with his clients as if they were old friends, had already begun to fear that the Times was more like a conventional big corporation than he had realized, and he wasn't happy about these conditions. He was desperately eager to design a skyscraper in New York, but, after the acclaim he received for his Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, he had come to expect a different kind of relationship with his clients—a relationship based on personal trust. Now, he felt, Golden and the Times people were starting to sound less like patrons of architecture and more like real-estate developers, the sort of businessmen who treat their architects as enemies, to be fought with and controlled at all costs. The Times, moreover, had formed an alliance with the developer Forest City Ratner, which would put up the building on the paper's behalf and rent out the upper floors. Forest City was not the sort of client Gehry found easy to please. And the project was further complicated by the fact that the site is part of the Forty-second Street Development Project, meaning that, in exchange for condemning the land and turning it over to the Times, both city and state officials would have plenty of say about what the building looked like.

When the conversation ended, Gehry immediately called David Childs, who was in New York, and suggested that

"And do you, Barry, take this woman, warts and all, to be your wife?"

• •

they withdraw from the competition and return the fifty thousand dollars they had received for preparing a design. Childs was accustomed to dealing with complicated situations—he is the architect of the huge Columbus Center project, at Columbus Circle, and the proposed New York Stock Exchange—and he had thought he could make the process work. But he was also proud of the fact that the design had been a true collaboration, and the last thing he wanted was to find himself cast as the pragmatist against Gehry the artist every time Gehry had any differences with the Times. It was Childs who composed the pair's formal letter of resignation from the competition. (Gehry had drafted one as well—an emotional paean to the aspirations of architecture—but the two men thought better of sending it.)

The Times won't say whether Gehry and Childs were in fact on the verge of being chosen, but the company was clearly stunned by the decision ("I thought they would be relieved," Gehry says), and its executives, as well as Muschamp, were upset. They hadn't expected to be fired by an architect before they had even hired him.

But Gehry and Childs's decision to withdraw may have goaded the paper and its partners into making a more radical choice for their new building. Michael Golden quickly turned to Renzo Piano, the Italian architect who designed the Menil Collection, in Houston, and was the co-architect of the Pompidou Center, in Paris. Piano's entry in the Times competition was widely believed to be the least practical of the four designs submitted. It called for a shimmering tower of glass screened by white ceramic rods, with floors and stairs that would appear to float, and an enormous open space at the ground level. Piano's firm has completed projects as large as the Kansai Airport, in Japan, and the reconstruction of the Potsdamer Platz, in Berlin, but it has designed few skyscrapers.

Golden asked Piano if he would be willing to make alterations to his scheme and come to New York to present it again to the search committee. Piano flew to New York on Sunday, October 1st, with a revised plan. He would, for example, no longer insist on putting all the elevators against the south wall of the building, taking up space that could have gone to outside offices. Piano is able to discuss architecture with a remarkable combination of poetry and practicality, and his apparent flexibility, combined with his charm, dazzled the Times committee. The following week, the paper put a photograph of the model of Piano's tower on the front page and announced that he had the job.

No one expects that Piano's design will be built without substantial revisions, of course, and what this skyscraper will actually look like when the Times is ready to start construction, in 2002—the building is expected to be finished in 2004—is anybody's guess. Piano is a brilliant and strong-willed architect, but he is up against powerful forces here. Can he convince a huge corporation, a tough-minded real-estate developer, several public agencies, including the notoriously conservative New York City buildings department, that they should all commit to putting up a skyscraper that bears almost no relationship to any tall building ever built in New York? In the lyrical design Piano has proposed, the building appears to be lighter and more elegant than even the most pristine International Style buildings in the city—almost ephemeral, a vast structure with the delicacy of mist.

Architectural competitions are time-consuming, and don't allow for the extended give-and-take between architect and client which is usually considered necessary for the completion of a successful design. They can also be frighteningly expensive. One of the architects who produced a design for the Times project estimated that his office spent roughly five hundred thousand dollars in staff time, consultants' fees, and travel expenses. (That architect called the competition "a very expensive lottery ticket.") The compensation the Times offered made up only a small fraction of this amount. Although invited competitions are popular among cultural institutions, such as museums, that want to produce buildings of architectural significance, they are rare among large corporations. The Times' decision to follow this ambitious route was especially surprising, since the paper, despite years of preaching in its pages the virtues of innovative architecture, has rarely followed its own advice. With the exception of a spirited new printing plant near LaGuardia Airport, designed by James Stewart Polshek in 1993, most of the Times' own architecture for various other printing plants and corporate subsidiaries over the last half century has been mediocre. There has always been a split between the Times' sense of itself as a great institution—a civic and cultural icon—and its sense of itself as a public corporation run for the benefit of its stockholders, and on the architectural front it has usually retreated into the comfortable middlebrow taste common to most large corporations.

It was not always thus. In 1904, eight years after Adolph S. Ochs purchased the Times, he moved the paper into a showy Italian Renaissance tower he'd put up in the center of Longacre Square, where Broadway crossed Forty-second Street. The Times Tower, designed by Eidlitz & McKenzie, had a sixteen-story base topped by a smaller, eight-story tower, and its oddly endearing shape made the building such a landmark that the intersection was soon renamed Times Square, to reflect the paper's presence. The building's tiny floors made it woefully impractical as a newspaper office (or for much of anything else other than its present function as a framework for advertising signs), and by 1913 the Times had moved many of its activities to a building it called the Annex, around the corner on Forty-third Street. The Annex, originally designed to echo the façade of the Times Tower, grew and grew over the years, most spectacularly in a 1924 addition by Ludlow & Peabody which loosely echoed the Château de Chambord and was topped by a pyramidal crown.

That may have been the high point of the Times' architectural patronage. In the nineteen-forties, the building was expanded again, with a flat, clunky addition on Forty-fourth Street, and a series of renovations that stripped much of the original detail off the façade. The Times Building had always been a curious mix of factory and office, but its original sections on Forty-third Street reflected Ochs's desire to project an air of permanence and dignity, and that made the building transcend its mundane function. As time went on, however, it began to look more and more like a factory. After the ornate arches over the entrance disappeared, in the nineteen-forties, and the old clock with Gothic filigree was taken off the façade, in the nineteen-sixties, the building seemed less like the stately hybrid Ochs had created and more like a sombre pile of bricks atop a series of loading docks. It wasn't surprising that in 1985 the Times fought an attempt by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to designate the building as a city landmark. There wasn't anything good worth saving, the paper's lawyers argued, and the commission, unwilling to get into a fight with a powerful newspaper that had been its staunch ally whenever its own interests were not directly threatened, quietly put the matter aside.

As recently as the early nineties, when the company decided to spend tens of millions of dollars renovating the main newsroom, on the third and fourth floors, no one expected that the Times would ever change its address. But a spiffy white newsroom did not cover up the fact that the printing functions for which the building had been designed were gradually moving to other sites. By the middle of 1997, no newspapers were being printed on Forty-third Street at all. What in the early nineties had been the largest manufacturing facility still operating in Manhattan was now just an office building, and nobody quite knew what to do with the vast amounts of space in the basement and subbasement that had held the Times' presses. Generations of ink had soaked into the floors, and, no matter how well you fixed it up, nothing could obscure the fact that all of this underground space was dark, awkwardly laid out, and more suitable to machines than people. At street level, meanwhile, most of the truck bays doubled as free parking for Times executives, who would jockey their cars out before the evening press run began.

Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., who succeeded his father as publisher in 1992 and as chairman in 1997, had a deep respect for the traditions of the paper, but he had also been preaching the value of change in the corporate culture, and he did not take naturally to the stuffy, waxed environment of the executive offices on the fourteenth floor, which Ada Louise Huxtable, the paper's first architecture critic, once described as "high W. & J. Sloane." Sulzberger's own

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COLUMBIA

taste was sharper and crisper, and he had committed himself to advancing the Times' presence in the digital world. Even if the old building could be further renovated, it would never be able to adapt easily to the latest communication technologies, and its high ceilings, solid walls, and heavy floors would never give the company the flexibility it required.

"We came grudgingly to the conclusion that we probably had to move," Michael Golden says. "This building was never going to be big enough for us, and the strengths it has aren't ones we need any longer. The fact that the floors are so strong you could store newsprint rolls on them just isn't something that we need." When the Times learned that a full block-front site on Eighth Avenue opposite the Port Authority Bus Terminal might be available, Sulzberger asked Golden, his cousin, to head a planning committee. "We realized that this is something that only comes around every hundred years for us, and we felt we had the potential to make a significant contribution to the architecture of New York," Golden says.

Officials of the Forty-second Street Development Project and the New York City Planning Commission first envisioned a more traditional skyscraper on the site, and prepared studies for a structure with setbacks along the lines of the Empire State Building. But the Times, which for so long had been an architectural laggard, encouraged a more adventurous approach. Golden's committee assembled a list of well-known architects, studied their work, and narrowed the list from several dozen to sixteen, then to eight. Committee members travelled around the country and to Europe to look at the eight architects' work, then cut the list to four: Piano; Gehry and Childs; the British architect Norman Foster, who designed the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank in Hong Kong; and Cesar Pelli, the architect of the World Financial Center, in lower Manhattan, and of the Petronas Towers, in Kuala Lumpur, the tallest buildings in the world. The four architects were sent a forty-eight-page brief. It included a statement by Muschamp which, like many of his columns, was an ode to the idea of the avant-garde. "Architecture, like journalism, is a daring form of knowing," Muschamp wrote. "It depends on a willingness to risk the unknown."

The four architects presented their designs in private meetings in the auditorium on the ninth floor of the Times Building on September 11th and 13th. The decision was to be made by a committee of six: Michael Golden; Janet Robinson, the president and general manager of the newspaper; Bruce Ratner and James Stuckey, of Forest City Ratner; Wendy Leventer, the president of the Forty-second Street Development Project; and Stephen Hayes, of the New York City Economic Development Corporation. But there were several invited guests at each presentation, including Muschamp, Joe Lelyveld, Lelyveld's daughter Amy, who is an architect, and both Arthur Sulzbergers.

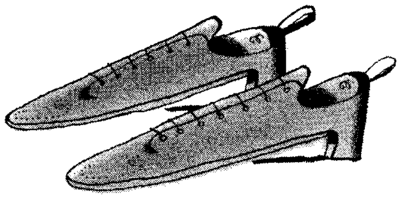
Foster took the Times at its word and, in association with the New York firm HLW International, produced a scheme that was, in effect, an enormous right triangle, its sloping side facing east. It was an elegant piece of structural design, further enlivened with interior gardens, but its minimalism would have looked startlingly out of place in midtown Manhattan. Foster's suave urbanity appealed to many of the Times' executives, but his design seemed more simplistic than many people had expected. And it had a flaw that made it nearly unworkable so far as the paper's development partner was concerned: its triangular shape meant that the upper floors, the space Forest City Ratner was entitled to rent out to tenants, were small and got smaller the higher up in the building you went.

Pelli, who has made his mark designing skyscrapers that softly meld modern and traditional forms, seemed out of his element in this festival of the avant-garde. He knew he was the most conservative of the bunch, but he decided to participate anyway, perhaps using the same reasoning that later led Gehry and Childs to withdraw—that the project would end up more like a typical piece of real-estate development. Pelli knew that could work in his favor. But his project, which looked like a conventional glass tower that had been chopped to give it a more angular shape, never seemed to excite the committee.

Although Pelli and Foster were never officially eliminated, it was clear to most of the participants that the Gehry-Childs design and the one by Piano were the most serious contenders. Gehry and Childs had spent much of the summer delving into the Times, prowling the newsroom with their staffs and asking every employee they could find to tell them something about the paper. "We got as involved with them as we would with a real client," Gehry said to me. "Our whole design grew out of the planning of the newsroom, and at the end we thought we had a building that said 'New York Times.' " Gehry's goal, he said, was to work closely with his clients, "so that together we create an object of desire." The newsroom they designed was at the base of the building, and it was an open atrium, with the main news desk in the center. The tower that would rise around it was of white glass, undulating and curving like pieces of ribbon, with huge versions of the Gothic letters of the Times' logo at the top like abstract art.

Piano was less visible at the Times in the weeks leading up to the presentations. He showed up at his first presentation with a design that was stunning but less fully developed than most of the others. After Gehry and Childs's withdrawal, the Times informed Piano that he had to find a local partner if he wanted to get the commission. At the beginning of the design process, Piano had approached the firm of Fox & Fowle, the architect of the Condé Nast and Reuters buildings at Times Square. The firm admired him but was reluctant to play second fiddle to an international celebrity architect. Then, when Piano was on the verge of getting the job—and needing help in adapting his design, so that it could get through the gantlet of approvals necessary in New York—Fox & Fowle changed its mind and the firms joined forces.

Piano is not concerned about the issues that led Gehry and Childs to withdraw. "It is much better as an architect when you see all the sides at the beginning," he says. "I am more worried when I have a client who shows me only one side of the face." Piano usually declines invitations to participate in competitions, and says he came close to saying no to the Times last June. "Competitions are very frustrating. They take so much energy—it is like falling in love with a lady and then she runs away with someone else." After he started sketching, he became more and more attached to the idea he was developing for the building, which he describes as "a building that will disappear in the air, that will bring the same magic to the sky line that the neo-Gothic brings."



No one knows what will become of the old Times Building, on Forty-third Street, which Michael Golden says the company will put up for sale. Any other owner will undoubtedly face the same problems the Times did—the building's long, twisting corridors, high ceilings, and heavy floors are the antithesis of the kind of space required by today's office planning. The place could conceivably be turned into a hotel or residential lofts, but that process might be prohibitively expensive. If the old Times Building is torn down, of course, it could be one of the city's most valuable development sites.

Lately, however, the Landmarks Commission and the Times have quietly resumed conversations about giving landmark status to the Forty-third Street side of the building, which is the only remaining part that has any degree of architectural significance. The paper isn't happy about the prospect. "It would certainly be to our economic benefit to sell it with no strings attached," Michael Golden told me. But the Times can't really promise any new owner that landmark designation wouldn't happen anyway, just after a sale is completed. The Landmarks Commission may have been intimidated by the prospect of fighting the Times, but it would have no worries about taking on some other owner of the building. So the chances that the building will disappear are slim, even though it may end up as the Hotel Ochs or Sulzberger Towers. About the only way the Times Building will be torn down, it seems fair to say, will be if the Times decides to do it itself. ◆

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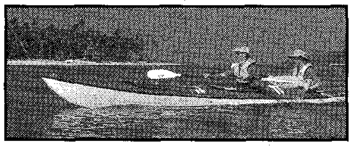
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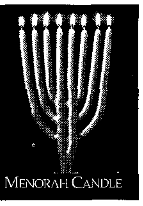

MENORAH CANDLE

MUSICAL EVENTS

SEMPER FIDELIO

The Met reaches for dramatic urgency.

BY ALEX ROSS

Earlier this month, Adrienne Dugger, a native of Atlanta, Georgia, stood in front of the curtain of the Metropolitan Opera with a huge grin on her face. It was not the compulsive smile of a diva who needs to wring a few more seconds of applause from her fans. Instead, it was the unbelieving smile of a woman who has come through danger intact. Dugger had stepped in on short notice to sing the lead in Puccini's "Turandot," one of the most taxing roles in the soprano repertory. At first, her voice sounded unsteady, especially in those cruelly exposed lines of "In questa reggia" with which she had to make her entrance. But she did not lack power, and her high C's cut thrillingly through the choral and orchestral climaxes of Act II. More than that, she acted the role with intelligence and passion, sharply telegraphing the rage of this proud princess who must surrender herself to a nameless foreigner. At one point, she shot the tenor Richard Margison a glance that might have given even Pavarotti the chills. She did all this while wearing cumbersome headgear that seemed to have upside-down bowling pins attached to it—part of the imperishable bric-a-brac of Franco Zeffirelli's 1987 production. A star is born? Hard to say. But the soprano gave flesh and blood to a character who is often little more than an onslaught of high notes.

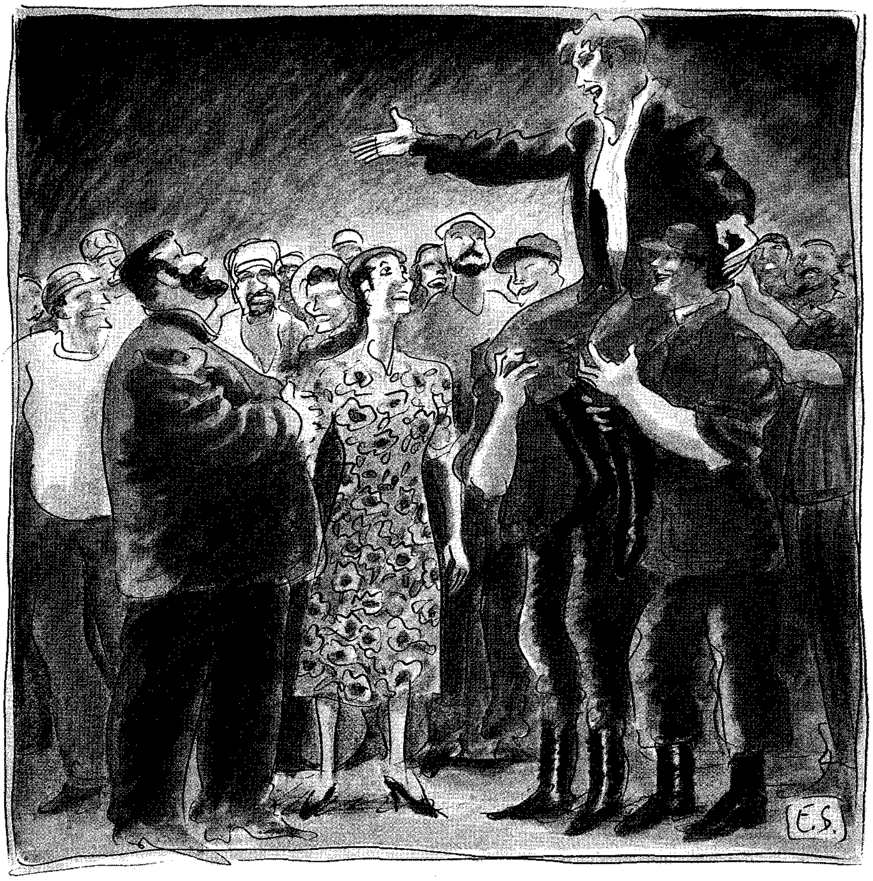
Dugger's last-minute triumph was one of several unexpected pleasures in the first few weeks of the Met season. Trips to the big house are more fun than they were six or eight years ago, when Disneyland scenery rumbled on and off the stage and recording stars went through the motions. Productions are more thoughtful, and the repertory has broadened bit by bit. Best of all, the new stars are taking care to act their roles, as well as sing them. On opening night, Bryn Terfel painted Don Giovanni as a rapacious thug who edged into insanity during the ordinarily chipper Champagne Aria. Renée Fleming kept pace with him, ruffling her customary poise and emitting, on the third syllable of the word "Abbastanza," the loveliest note of the year. Karita Mattila, heading a new production of "Fidelio," gave a performance that will be talked about for years. Singers of the post-Pavarotti generation are dispensing with operatic clichés and trying to build character gesture by gesture. They may not have the purely vocal charisma of Corelli or Tebaldi, but their energy is giving the art new strength.

Another explanation for the fresh air at the Met is that money is coming in from a fresh source. Many productions now come courtesy of the Nasdaq billionaire Alberto Vilar, who has, in the last few years, become the leading benefactor of classical music around the world. Habitual grumblers in the opera world have criticized Vilar's habit of affixing his name and visage to everything he underwrites, but if people don't mind calling Beethoven masterpieces by the names "Razumovsky" and "Archduke" they shouldn't complain that the Met has some kind of Vilar restaurant. Vilar is certainly a step up from the Met's last giver-in-chief, Sybil Harrington, who commissioned the Zeffirelli extravaganzas of the eighties and obtained spectacle at the expense of drama. Vilar's gifts seem to come with no strings attached, and Joseph Volpe, the Met's general manager, has been free to pursue a generally sane philosophy of opera production. The stagings are more adventurous, and in only a few cases have they blundered into the kind of inane conceptualism that is the curse of European houses. The Met also has been adding new operas to its roster. In January, with Vilar's help, it will present Busoni's "Doktor Faust," the one musical "Faust" that can hold its own with Goethe's.

The emotional generosity of younger singers and the financial generosity of Vilar meet happily in the new production of Beethoven's "Fidelio," which runs through January. The director is Jürgen Flimm, who put together the sometimes perplexing, sometimes enthralling "Ring" that was seen in Bayreuth last summer. This time, Flimm has come up with a staging that makes sense all the way through. Beethoven's drama of liberation is updated to the early twentieth century, and set in a generic country where the prison system has become a vehicle for abuse. The sets, by Robert Israel, are ominous and grand: a grungy prison courtyard in the first act, a vast concrete dungeon in the second. Flimm lavishes attention on the habits and gestures of the odd little family that operates the prison: Warden Rocco, obedient but decent; his daughter, Marzelline, eager to be married; and the nervous young Fidelio, who is actually Leonore in disguise, waiting to rescue her husband, Florestan, from the dungeon below. Their nemesis is Don Pizarro, the prison governor, who acts at first like a cool bureaucrat of terror and then coughs up the animal hatred within him.

The singers worked industriously within Flimm's design. The towering young bass René Pape, as Rocco, even went a bit overboard with his hapless-minion act, and his voice was almost too majestically dark for the part. (When he sings Hagen in the "Ring," people will flee in terror.) Falk Struckmann made Pizarro a figure out of an expressionist thriller. Ben Heppner started with a thunderous high G, grew cautious later on, but hit the notes of Florestan's essential goodness. The star of the show was Mattila, the fearless Finnish soprano, who worked up a dramatic storm without letting go of the fundamental beauty of her voice. Handsome to behold in her Fidelio haircut, she threw herself into the libretto-driven bits of business that are the trademark of Flimm's productions. In her central aria, "Abscheulicher! wo eilst du hin," as she sang, "If only I could break into the place where evil bound you in chains," she strained mightily to raise the trapdoor to the cellar, holding firm notes all the while. She caused a near riot in the house when she took her bows.

The conductor was James Levine, who in previous appearances this season had been falling a few notches below his usual level. His "Don Giovanni" flowed along at a brisk pace, but without the surges of passion that Terfel's lead demanded. His "Pelléas" went on for four long hours, undercutting a great performance by José van Dam, who charted the emotions of Golaud as on a seismograph. Levine came back to life in "Fidelio," getting a brilliant, biting sound from the orchestra. Still, his on-and-off pattern raises the familiar questions of whether he is stretching himself too thin and whether fresh blood is needed on the podium. On an average night, with an average conductor, the quality of the Met orchestra can take a dive. At the "Turandot" matinée, Marco Armiliato had trouble keeping a steady beat. There is also the old problem of productions growing stale over time. When Jonathan Miller's "Pelléas" first appeared, in 1995, it offered a richly nuanced picture of upper-class ennui; now it is merely boring.



Ben Heppner as Florestan (left) and Karita Mattila as Leonore (held aloft), in a triumphant new "Fidelio" that has an unsettling relevance to today's headlines.

EDWARD SOREL

For the moment, though, the Met has a great show in this "Fidelio." Something especially intriguing happens right at the end. After Don Fernando, the king's minister, metes out justice, the chorus has a jubilant dance of freedom, which stirs memories of the fall of the Berlin Wall and also uncannily resembles recent scenes on the streets of Belgrade. As the crowd gets on its knees to offer thanks to God, you feel, for a long moment, the spirit of Beethoven hovering in the air. Yet the director is unwilling to give the final tableau a utopian cast, and he adds a few dark touches. Robert Lloyd's Don Fernando comes across as a political strongman who plays on the emotions of the moment. And when soldiers string up Pizarro by the neck there is a chilling sense that all this high elation may not last forever. The image is an ugly one, but there is truth in it. When was the last time the Met put on a production whose relevance to current events was disturbingly acute? Flimm is a smart director, and the Met should give him anything he wants. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

Dark deeds in "The Yards" and dancing to "Billy Elliot."

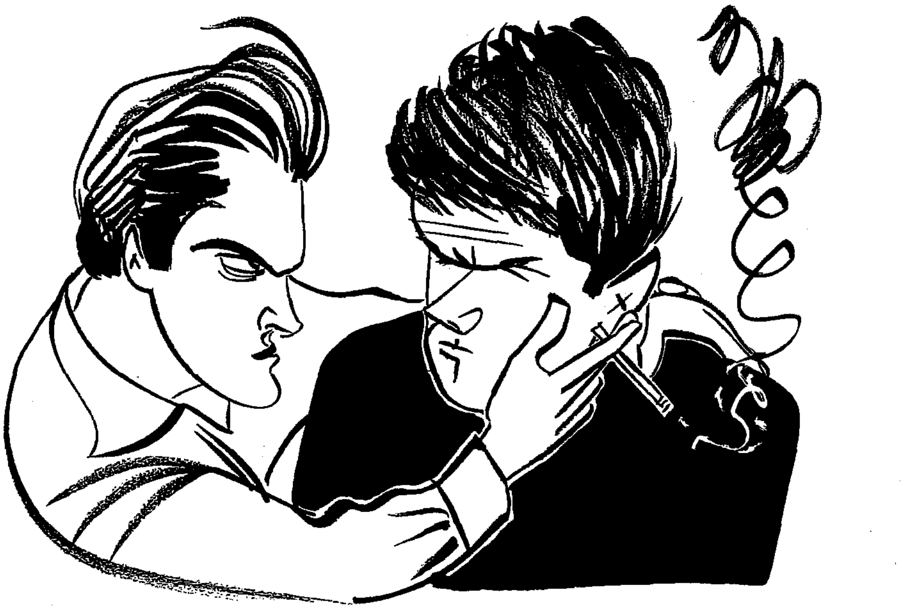
BY ANTHONY LANE

The last James Gray picture, "Little Odessa," was about a criminal coming back to his old neighborhood, comforting his ailing mother, and getting himself into trouble. The new James Gray picture, "The Yards," is about a criminal coming back to his old neighborhood, comforting his ailing mother, and getting himself into trouble. Do not be fooled by this fleeting resemblance. The first movie was set in the Russian community of Brooklyn, whereas the second delves into the silky, glamorous world of spare parts and supply contracts in the New York subway system. More important, "Little Odessa," for all its snowstruck beauty, was a piece of apprentice work, with a young director trying on a style. This time around, it fits.

Mark Wahlberg, last seen in "The Perfect Storm," plays Leo Handler—long in the face, down in the mouth, and desperate to stay clean after serving sixteen months for auto theft. A welcoming party greets him on his return from jail, but the prodigal son sidles quietly through the door, as if wishing that none of them, least of all himself, had to be there. As the camera pokes around the room, casually introducing us to Leo's reception committee, you begin to see what a fine, layered collection of characters Gray has bolted together: there's Leo's mother, Val (Ellen Burstyn), her widowed sister Kitty (Faye Dunaway), and Kitty's daughter Erica (Charlize Theron), who seems strangely bowed down, though whether by mourning or by the sheer weight of mascara it is hard to say.

Erica is dating Leo's best friend, Willie Gutierrez (Joaquin Phoenix), who has money to burn and every intention of drawing Leo to the flame. The clanging memory of "Gladiator" is such that it takes a while to forget Phoenix in a suit of armor and get used to him in just a suit; what hasn't changed is the tense, oddly compacted expression on his face, as if his head were caught in an invisible vise. Willie toils in the subway offices, hustling for contracts, greasing every palm he can find; Leo becomes his sidekick, to the disapproval of Frank Olchin (James Caan), who runs the legitimate (or, at least, the visible) end of the business. Frank is Leo's uncle by marriage, being Aunt Kitty's new husband, and he wants Leo to earn an honest trade. Confused? You should be. The family tree in this movie is so entangled that it ends up blocking its own light and sucking the sap from surrounding growths. It lacks the pontifical suavity of "The Godfather," but Gray has inherited Coppola's dark central joke—a vision of amity and betrayal outgrowing one's immediate circle, rooting into the city and beyond.

In fact, if you have seen "The Godfather" recently, or, better still, Fritz Lang's "Human Desire" (the doomiest of train flicks), you will be nicely primed for "The Yards." The problem for Gray is that most viewers now exist on a diet of "The Sopranos" and have come to enjoy their Mob melodrama with a coating of comedy, like bitter chocolate. "The Yards" has an old-fashioned heft to it, and it may strike you as perilously humorless; the only course of action, as you take your seat, is to switch off any wicked ironies at the same time as your cell phone and yield to the slow, Stygian pleasures that Gray has stirred up. Offhand, I can think of four great nocturnal scenes. First, the evening on which Willie takes Leo and a band of saboteurs to the yards, where they short out the circuitry installed by their rivals; Leo looks trapped by the dusty bronze glow of the rails, and, indeed, from here on he becomes a wanted man. Then, there are the nights with guns, all but drowned in a gray-green gauze of light: Leo in a hospital, sneaking up on a patient who must never be allowed to wake, or tracking a silent foe on the far side of his apartment wall, aiming where he thinks the head must be. Finally, the best and most fruitless fight I have seen in modern movies: a scrap between Leo and Willie, full of tugged shirts and blows that never connect, with the camera calmly pulling back to watch the old friends slug it out in the ruinous gold of the street lamps.



Joaquin Phoenix and Mark Wahlberg play friends turned foes.

TOM BACHTELL

That is Gray's way: an enriched realism, in which bodies shift and sweat with familiar human awkwardness but the world around them feels dreamed. Gray likes to paint scenes in watercolor before he shoots them, and it's a dangerous talent; the directors we value for their compositional care—men as different as David

Lean and Michael Mann—are also those who have to fight hardest to prevent their characters from shrinking to figures in a landscape. Gray beats the trap, this time, by hiring a cast of dependables (you try sidelining Faye Dunaway) and, more cleverly still, by turning that very issue—the treatment of people as objects and commodities—into the meat of his plot. Look at Leo and Willie, near the beginning, striding into Borough Hall, with its blank white curves and its little knot of tough guys at the far end; how can the young pair hope to fill that space? Even between them, the balance tips; Leo is loved by Willie, then chased, then feared for what he might divulge. With fifteen minutes to go, "The Yards" could head in any number of directions: it could hang fire in indecisive gloom, or spout a Coppola bloodbath, or even rouse itself for a Capra-style trouncing of the villains and a promise to clean up the streets. I am not sure about Gray's eventual choice, but the rest of his film smells oily and authentic; if you can take the murk, and the grownup lack of special effects, it becomes both thrilling and dreadful to see these driven souls rattle, like subway cars, toward their destination.

People like to see a deserving hero rise above adversity, and if he happens to rise on point to the sound of "Swan Lake" so be it. The British film "Billy Elliot" stars Jamie Bell as the eponymous Billy, a working-class lad who discovers the joys of ballet. This may be music to the ears of the local dance teacher, Mrs. Wilkinson (Julie Walters), who gives the boy personal instruction from somewhere inside a cloud of cigarette smoke, but it's a source of shame to his widowed father (Gary Lewis) and his elder brother (Jamie Draven). Both men are miners, and they have enough to oppress and confuse them without the added problem of a family member pirouetting in the bathroom. The story is set in 1984, during the miners' strike, although the director, Stephen Daldry, is much happier with history as a flutter of surreal backdrops than as foreground strife. The scene in which a mob of truncheon-swinging cops tramples through terraced houses in pursuit of Billy's brother feels like galumphing overstatement, whereas the brief sight of Billy's friend Debbie (Nicola Blackwell) scraping a stick against a silent rank of policemen's riot shields, without even noticing what she is doing, tells you all you need to know about living under siege.

Daldry's film works tirelessly to dispel the idea that there is anything fancy, let alone effeminate, in a balletic boy. Every sign of sexual dislocation is transferred to Billy's pal Michael (Stuart Wells), who wears a dress around the house, leaving Billy to revel confidently in four-square manliness. As it stands, "Billy Elliot" is only half a good film. The first forty-five minutes are tough and funny; the rest grows whimsical, often embarrassing, and it suggests that Daldry was gripped more by Billy's struggle than by its resolution. I felt sorry for Jamie Bell, having to mouth some monster of a speech about how it feels to dance. "It's like there's fire in me body," he explains, "like a bird . . . like electricity." Well, which? It's clear that Bell—ratty, pre-handsome, easily pinched with pain or flushed with feelings that he can't control—is as much of a find as the boy he plays, and I wish someone had cut the dross and given him more of what he does best: a fist-clenching, gravity-hating frustration. The highlight of the movie has him dancing to the Jam—down the street, on the rooftops, and even in the outside lavatory, whacking the walls and incorporating sneery V signs into his routine. American viewers should devour this, although I wonder what—after "Brassed Off," "The Full Monty," and now "Billy Elliot"—they think the North of England is actually like. A non-stop carnival of performing arts, presumably, plus a few brave individuals who defy the call for light entertainment and assert their basic right to go down a pit. Why doesn't someone make a film about them? ♦

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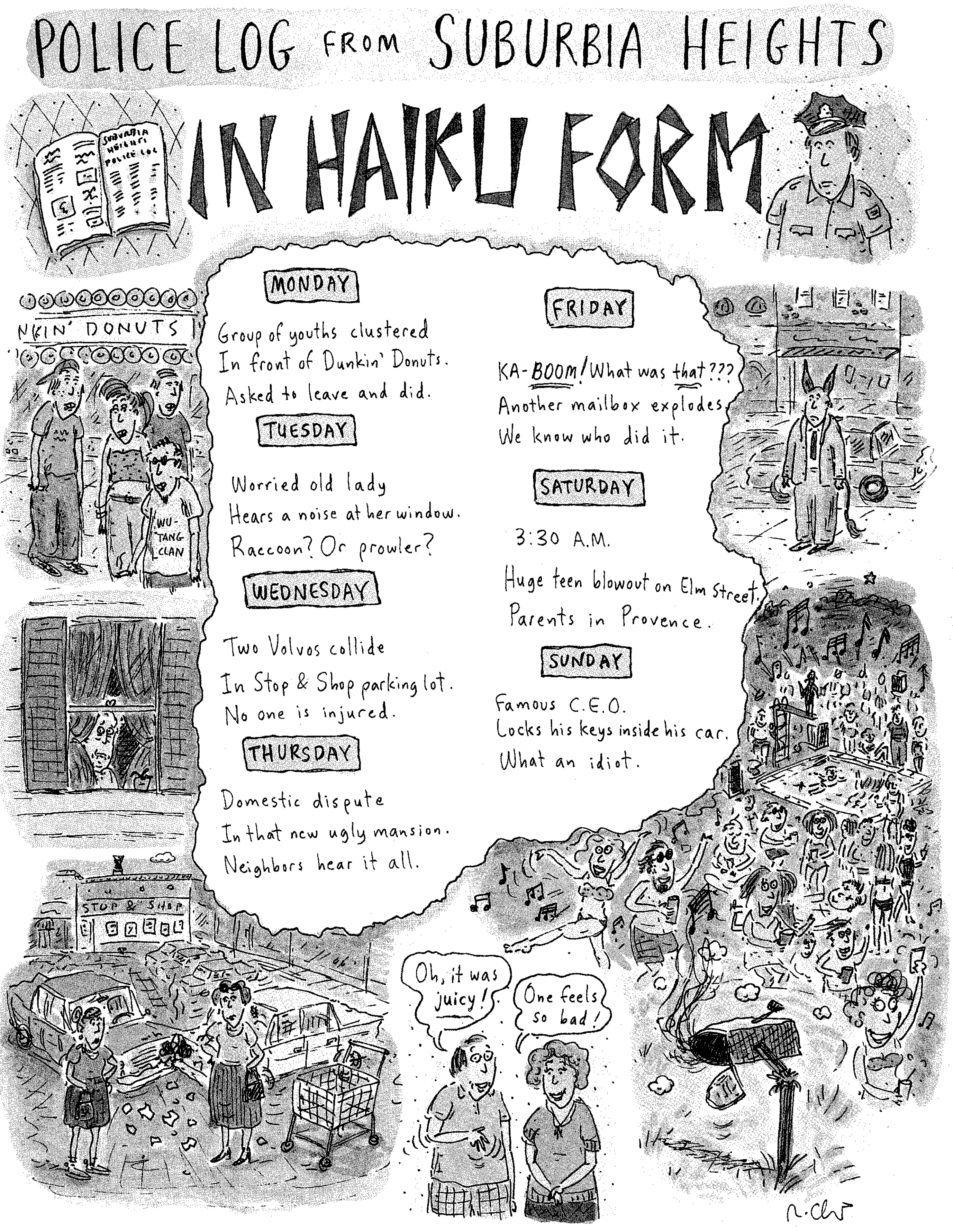


POLICE LOG FROM SUBURBIA HEIGHTS IN HAIKU FORM

MONDAY

Group of youths clustered
In front of Dunkin' Donuts.
Asked to leave and did.

TUESDAY

Worried old lady
Hears a noise at her window.
Raccoon? Or prowler?

WEDNESDAY

Two Volvos collide
In Stop & Shop parking lot.
No one is injured.

THURSDAY

Domestic dispute
In that new ugly mansion.
Neighbors hear it all.

FRIDAY

KA-BOOM! What was that???
Another mailbox explodes.
We know who did it.

SATURDAY

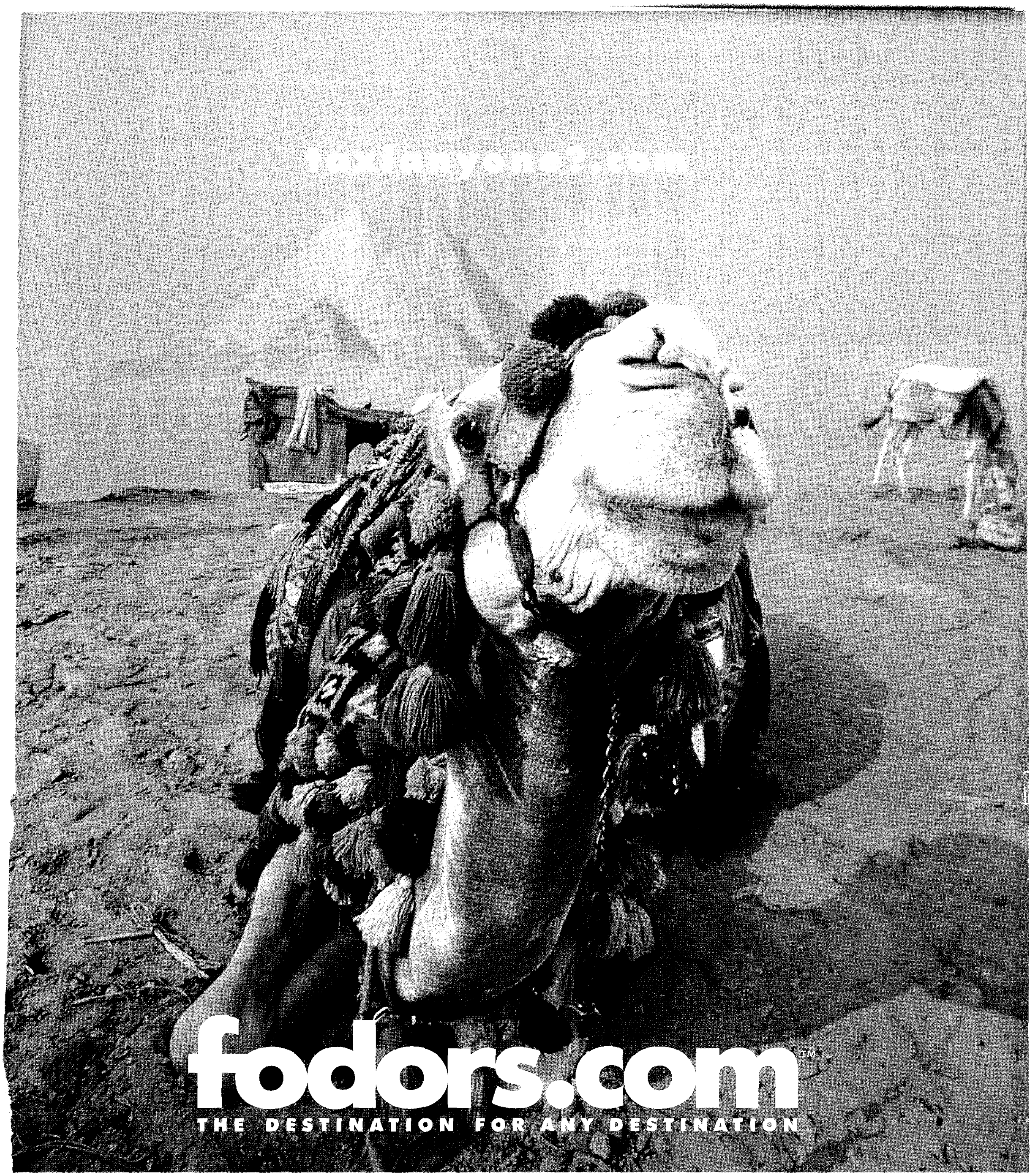
3:30 A.M.

Huge teen blowout on Elm Street.
Parents in Provence.

SUNDAY

Famous C.E.O.
Locks his keys inside his car.
What an idiot.

SUBURBIA HEIGHTS POLICE LOG
NKIN' DONUTS
WU-TANG CLAN
STOP & SHOP
Oh, it was juicy!
One feels so bad!



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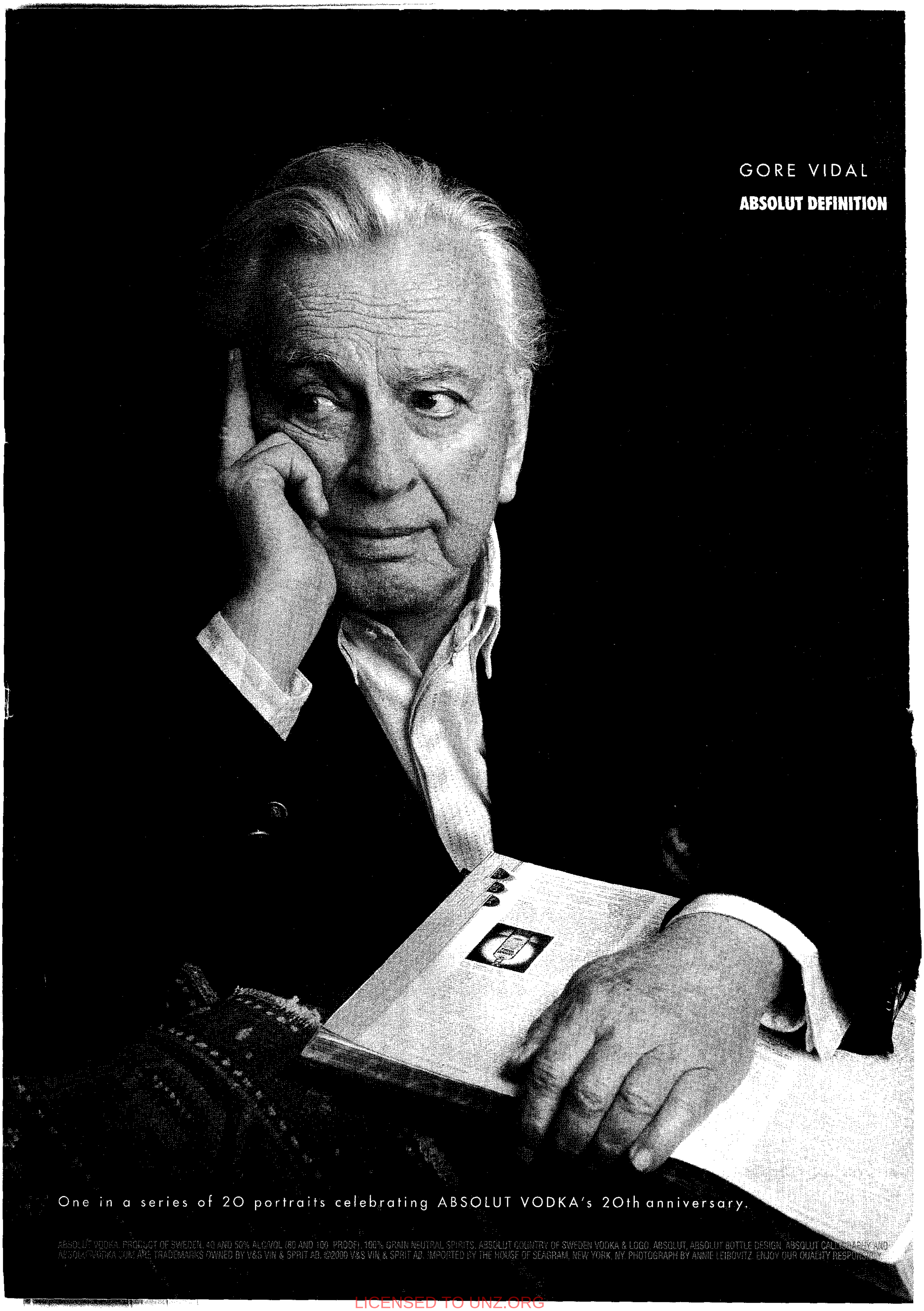

GORE VIDAL

ABSOLUT DEFINITION

One in a series of 20 portraits celebrating ABSOLUT VODKA's 20th anniversary.

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